CAST UP BY THE TIDE

DORA DELMAR

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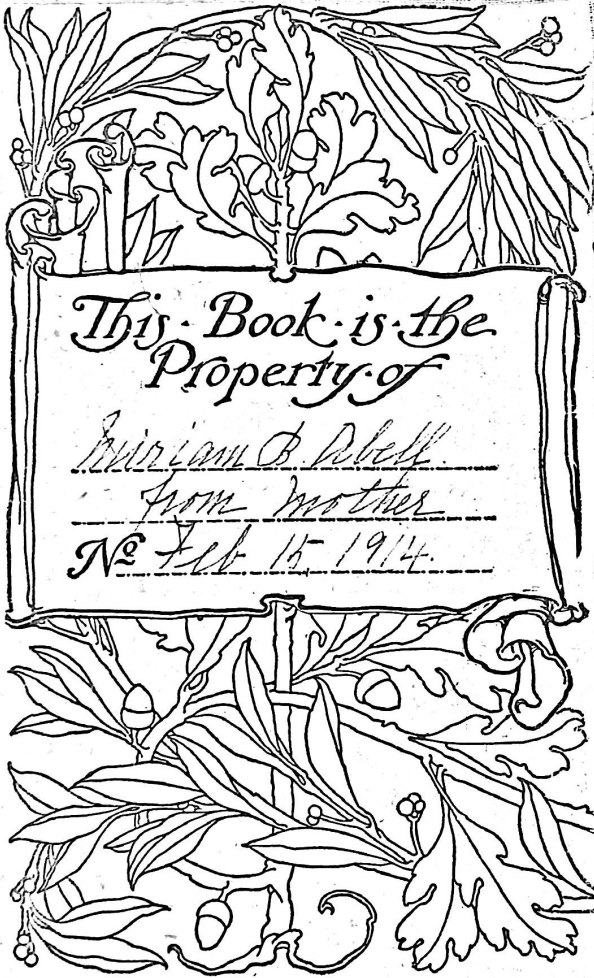
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CAST UP BY THE TIDE

BY

DORA DELMAR

Author of
"Had She Foreseen," "A Handsome Sinner,"
"By a Golden Cord," etc.

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THE UNKNOWN.

Oh, waving cypress! Cheek of rose!
Oh, jasmine-breathing bosom! say,
Tell me each charm that round her glows,
Who are ye that my heart betray?
Tyrant unkind! to whom I bow,
Oh, life-destroyer!—who art thou?

I saw thy form of waving grace,
I heard thy soft and gentle sighs;
I gazed on that enchanting face,
And looked in thy Narcissus eyes:
Oh! by the hopes thy smiles allow,
Bright soul inspirer—who art thou?

Where'er she walks, amidst the shades
Where perfumed hyacinths unclose,
Danger her every glance pervades—
Her bow is bent on friends and foes.
Thy rich cheek shames the rose—thy brow
Is like the young moon—who art thou?

KHOKANI.

THE WEB OF THOUGHT.

Sister, 'tis the noon of night:
  Let us in the web of thought
Weave the threads of ancient song,
  From the realms of fairies brought.

Thou shalt stain the dusky warp
  In nightshade wet with twilight dew;
I with streaks of morning gold
  Will strike the fabric through and through.

MRS. WHITMAN.

THE DREAMER.

The sun comes up and the sun goes down,
And day and night are the same as one;
The year grows green and the year grows brown,
And what is it all when all is done?
Grains of sombre or shining sand
Sliding into and out of the hand.

And men go down in ships to the seas,
And a hundred ships are the same as one;
And backward and forward blows the breeze,
And what is it all when all is done?
A tide with never a shore in sight
Setting steadily on to the night.

The fisher droppeth his net in the stream,
And a hundred streams are the same as one;
And the maiden dreameth her love-lit dream,
And what is it all when all is done?
The net of the fisher the burden breaks,
And always the dreaming the dreamer wakes.

HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD.

CAST UP BY THE TIDE.

CHAPTER I.

A STORMY SUNSET.

THE time was sunset on an evening in earliest September. The west was aflame with lurid clouds, crossed horizontally by long lines of black, giving the idea that the day, flushed, heated after its course, was pausing to gaze back through the bars of night at the earth it was leaving behind.

The reflection fell like fire upon the broad Atlantic, stretching far, far away in unbroken expanse to Greenland; the ocean, catching wondrous and prismatic hues from the heavens, and bearing them on the long, sweeping rollers, from the horizon, as it seemed, to break in a dark ultramarine upon the shores of Inesscauld, or dash themselves against the beetling cliffs, towering high, and jutting out in dark, grand headlands.

The village of Inesscauld nestled like a sea-bird's nest in a canyon between two of these headlands, and about half a mile from the shore, upon which, at the present moment, a few fishing-boats were drawn up high, that lurid glow westward betokening to the experienced seaman storm, wind, and rain ere morning.

Now a great calm rested over land and sea—the calm of a great rest, save when the stillness was disturbed by the warning scream of one of the many sea-birds that flitted and dived, brushing the wave crests with their plumy breasts, ere they finally retired to their nests on the ledges or in the crannies of the rocks.

From the village, which indeed was composed but of a few fishers' cottages, a rather winding path led down to the beach. Literally down, for it was both precipitous and rugged, and up which the Atlantic gales tore with terrific force.

Upon this path stood a young girl, or, rather, sat, for she more than leaned upon a bowlder-like projection of the cliff, upon which one hand rested—a small, delicate hand, with slender, tapering fingers—as she gazed seaward.

She was attired in a blue serge dress, unmistakably home made, yet which received a grace from the slender, well-carried figure of its youthful wearer. About her throat, fair and full, was knotted a tartan kerchief; on her head, which, like Tennyson's Maud, ran over with curls, of gold-brown hue, rested a rather worn Tam-o'-Shanter, beneath which was the prettiest, most winsome face man could look upon.

Altogether it was a countenance one would turn frequently to look upon, with an unconscious sense, perhaps, that the heart was appealed to rather than the eye, for Gweneth Fane —at this period not much over seventeen—was by no means handsome, as that word is understood; but there was a freshness, a bright intelligence, a girlish, innocent happiness, in her exceeding prettiness.

Indeed, Gweneth had had, as yet, but one trouble in life—her mother's indisposition, Mrs. Fane being a confirmed invalid, unable, of her own unaided self, to move from her couch to her bed, or *vice versa*, a species of paralysis having rendered the lower limbs useless.

Why Mrs. Fane, evidently a highly educated lady, had—adopting the term so often used—buried herself in such a stagnant, out-of-the-way place as Inesscauld, Gweneth never wondered, simply because the great world southward was almost a mystery to her, and she was too happy, enjoying the freedom, beauty, and grandeur of the only home she could be said ever to have known, to trouble herself about any other.

Emulation she did not understand. "Excelsior" was a word that had never been whispered in her ear. It is discontent that creates restlessness, ambition; Gweneth was contented. All the stronger feelings that formed her character as yet laid dormant in her bosom, like the slumbering earthquake in the earth. The only two lessons life, as yet, had taught her, were to trust and love.

At this time she had but two upon whom to bestow her warm, girlish affection—her mother and old Christie. Companions she had none; and never having known, did not miss them. To wander about the cliffs and along the shore, to hold long chats with the fishers and their wives, her chief amusement, sufficed and made her existence one of peace and rest.

To-day she had been on the shore, and now, returning home, had paused to admire the splendid sunset, making a pent-house of her little hand to shield her eyes from the lingering glare of the sinking sun.

She had not altered her position when a heavy step sounded coming down the path. Lowering her hand, and glancing back, Gweneth perceived a grizzled old fisher, in huge sea-boots, and with nets over his shoulder, advancing.

"An' are you going fishing, Donald?" she asked.

"Na, na, mees," was the response, as the old man, halting, rubbed his stubby chin. "It'll be a storm th' night, An' the herrings ha' been sae pleentiful, that I may e'en bide till after the storm."

"Ay, Donald, but you are wise," replied Gweneth. "What would your daughter Elsie and her pretty bairn do without you? It is kind of you to think of them. They'd not care much for the herrings, or the siller either, if you were not there to share."

The old man's clear light-blue eyes turned to the girl with a smile of exceeding kindness.

"Ye've always a pleasant word, Mees Gweneth," he said;

"an' ye bonnie face is as a pure blink of God's sunshine. How may be your mither the day?"

"She is not quite so well, Donald, thank you. She is as drowsy as ever she is when there's a storm in the air."

"Ay, that is strange, but it is true. God makes some people just to serve as weather-glasses. I am hoping she liked the haddies I left with the gude body, Christie."

"Yes, indeed, Donald, she liked them much. But if not going fishing, where are you going?"

"Only roond the headland to Scartliff. I'll be back before the storm breaks."

"Mind you are, Donald," said Gweneth, gayly. "There goes the sun. I shall be late for tea."

She had risen from the bowlder, and now, wishing the old fisher good-by, continued her way, with a light, quick step, up the path.

Soon a tinier one deviated from it, which Gweneth took. It led to a small but strongly built cottage, standing alone and higher up than the village, yet sufficiently protected to escape the full force of the fierce gales and hurricanes which prevailed during certain seasons of the year.

It faced the sea at an angle, looking southwest. A flint and cobble wall, about two feet and a half high, inclosed a garden in which only the hardiest plants and shrubs grew while creepers to cover the blank bareness of the walls would have been rent, torn, and killed before a season was over. Yet color of pre-Raphaelite hues was not wanting, for the hill that backed it was one sweep of purple heather.

Passing through the gate, the girl entered the house, the door of which stood open. A clatter of china, at the end of the kitchen, told her Christie was preparing the evening meal, and relieved that she was in time, turning the handle of the door to her right, for the cottage was a double one, she went into the room beyond.

It was a sitting-room, simply but prettily furnished, while a book-case full of well-selected books, and a piano, upon which were scattered pieces of music, vocal and instrumental, would have proclaimed the social status of their owner, without the confirmatory glance at the delicate-looking lady reclining on the couch by the window.

Why Mrs. Fane had chosen to immure herself and child in such an out-of-the-way, wild, uncultivated—mentally as agriculturally—spot, would have been a mystery to most, if it were not to Gweneth. Even the fishers, who were so very primitive that they rarely troubled themselves with any one's affairs but their own, at times wondered why this pale, delicate lady, with a refinement they respected, though they could not understand, had settled here among them.

Old Elspie, the oldest inhabitant at Inesscauld, solved the riddle in a way that was generally accepted in the village:

"Dunna ye see the puir leddie is in black? 'deed, that she's a widdy? Can na ye un'erstand that she's lost her gude mon, and is sair and breakit o' heart? Theer's na joy, na lightsomeness in the world till her noo he's gang awa'."

Whether that was the cause of her isolation from her proper sphere, or there was another reason, Mrs. Fane, during the many years of her residence at Inesscauld, had never dropped a hint.

Her sad affliction prevented her coming in contact with any but her child and Christie, who, possessed of a warm, honest heart, had speedily taken the delicate mother and pretty child under her protection and into her love.

To say that Mrs. Fane had once been remarkably handsome would not be correct speaking, for she was so still. Some settled sorrow had lined and aged her face; but for all that, or allowing for that, in years she might not have reached forty. The black she had worn on her arrival at Inesscauld she had never abandoned, while the plain muslin cap that rested on her thick, luxuriant hair, here and there streaked with gray, seemed to carry out old Elspie's assertion that she had lost her "gude mon, and hence was a widdy."

The sadness marking her features was always more pronounced when alone. At such times an occasional long-drawn sigh would heave her bosom; sighs that had been more frequent as Gweneth had approached maidenhood.

The sadness had been more than usual this afternoon, as the lady, supported by cushions, deftly plied her knitting-needles; the red reflection of the sunset, that enveloped her where she lay, giving a color to her cheek which would fade with the western glow.

At the sound of the closing gate, the work dropped on the knitter's lap, the depression lifted from her features, and the smile which greeted Gweneth's was bright and happy.

"I thought I was late, mamma," said the girl, bending over the couch to kiss its occupant. "The sunset delayed me."

"Is it not beautiful?" remarked Mrs. Fane. "These northern sunsets are, like the northern coasts, grand and awesome."

"Donald says it presages a storm," rejoined Gweneth, removing her cap, and showing that a "satin snood boun' up her hair."

"God keep all ships off this coast, then," said the lady, reverently.

"Amen," concluded the girl. "The fishing has been so plentiful lately that Donald says they can afford to rest on land to-night."

"That's well, for the wives and bairns.

> "Who'll buy my caller herrin'?
> Oh, you may ca' them vulgar faring!
> Wives and mithers, maist despairing,
> Ca' them lives o' men,"

hummed Gweneth, moving lightly about the apartment. "Mamma, you make me ashamed of myself; you are always busy—work, work, work."

"Idle fingers make sad hearts," smiled Mrs. Fane. "You, Gwen, use your feet—a pleasure denied me."

"Poor mamma"—with quick sympathy—"are you better than before I went out?"

"I am not more indisposed than usual, darling. It's only the drowsiness, caused, I suspect, by the approaching storm. Here comes Christie with tea. Possibly that will remove the languor upon me."

A somewhat heavy tread along the passage, and now the thump of a tray against the door, heralded Christie's advent. Gweneth hastened to admit her, and there entered a stout, middle-sized, over middle-aged Scotch woman, with homely yet shrewd features.

Gweneth had already placed the table near the invalid's couch, and now assisted in arranging the tea things, the mother's eyes following her movements, it seemed, with more than usual affection, while Christie chattered about the butter being a wee bit on the turn, she feared, and a want of success that afternoon in preparing the bannocks.

"When you make complaint, Christie," laughed Gweneth, "I always find the cakes better than usual. I believe you are fishing for a compliment."

"It's your gudeness to say the like, Mees Gwen," responded the old woman; "but I'm na feesher even for compleements. In truth, the fire would na burn, and that gadding body, Meg Alison, came in an' hindered me wi' her clavers. Deil tak' the woman."

"Oh, Christie!" ejaculated Gweneth.

"Weel, mees, as I no believe in the deil, there's na harm done," said Christie, as she quitted the room.

"Christie has broad views," remarked Mrs. Fane.

"And possesses the courage to advance her opinions," smiled Gweneth, pouring out the tea. "Mamma, now the crimson has gone from the sky, I think you are paler than this morning."

"It is but the drowsy oppression, darling. I have been fighting against it—"

"Which was wrong," interrupted Gweneth; "you should yield to it—to resist only makes you weaker. After tea I'll read you to sleep."

"There will be no need, Gwen, for it is with difficulty I can keep awake."

So when Christie removed the tea things, she was told not to bring the light yet, and Mrs. Fane lay back, while Gweneth sat near on a low stool, watching her, and sinking into waking dreamland. None of her dreams told her of the great change which, now on the threshold, was soon to step over it into her young life, the even, contented tenor of which was to be dissipated forever.

Mrs. Fane soon slumbered heavily. Twilight faded before night, semi-darkness crept into the room; the wind, already rising, came stealing up from the sea in sighing, fitful gusts; the pale outlight, falling through the window, rested on the white, delicate countenance of the sleeper.

The gloom, the silence, began to weigh upon Gweneth with a depressing effect unnatural to her. A sudden idea came into her mind, which brought a smile to her lips. Rising noiselessly, on tiptoe she left the room.

Scarcely had she gone than Mrs. Fane moved in her sleep; then, starting up, spoke aloud the words that were in her dream.

The sound of her own voice awakened her, and she was conscious of the words she had uttered. A moment she seemed paralyzed with a sudden terror, then, leaning slightly forward, peering into the dark shadows which crowded the apartment, she exclaimed:

"Gweneth, tell me, was I talking in my sleep? What—what was it I said? We say such strange things in dreams, don't we?—ha! ha! Gwen, dear, why don't you answer?"

At that instant she caught the faint sound of the girl's voice in the kitchen.

Dropping back on to the pillow with an earnest thankfulness impossible to describe, she ejaculated:

"Thank Heaven, she was not here!"

CHAPTER II.

GWENETH'S FORTUNE.

ON quitting the sitting-room, Gweneth went to the kitchen, where, by this time, having cleared all up, Christie was seated at work in the bright, cheerful "ingle neuk."

"Christie," said Gweneth, approaching the fire, and from habit, more than need, extending her hands to the blaze, "mamma's asleep, so I've come to claim your promise."

"The promise, Mees Gwen? If I ha' made ane, I'm no ane to gae fra' it."

"I know that, Christie; my mind is quite at rest on that score," laughed Gweneth.

"An' wha' may be its nature, for I've clean forgotten?"

"Don't you remember, when your head ached the other day, and I went down to Donald for the fish, you promised me, as I was a 'gude bairn,' you would tell me my fortune?"

"Hoot, toot!" ejaculated the old woman; "wha' ken I o' fortunes, indeed? Dinna fash your head wi' such follies; the fortune that is wi' us is a' the fortune I ken."

"Now, Christie, speak the truth," said Gweneth, shaking her finger at her, "for I'm a witness against you, if you do not. Did I not, the other night, peep in through the casement, and see you seated, with a countenance full of mystery and portent, in that very chair, a circle of cards before you, which you were counting and pausing, counting and pausing over, like a true sibyl?"

"What for, lassie, did ye come spying on me?" broke out Christie. "There's na harm in a pack o' cards, hooever they're laid; but ye mither would think me daft to put such nonsense in ye head."

"My mother would think nothing of the kind; besides, have you not told me that your word is as good as your bond? Put down your work, there's a dear Christie," pleaded Gweneth, half earnestly, half roguishly. "Bring out the cards from their hiding-place and begin."

"Mees Gwen, ye'd just wheedle the rocks themsel' to do ye biddin'," rejoined the old woman, not, in truth, displeased to display her powers of divination. "But," pausing, "are ye sure, noo, your mither is asleep?"

Gweneth having answered in the affirmative, Christie dived down at the bottom of a trunk standing under the window, and produced a pack of cards, which was soon being dealt and arranged in mystic circle, when Christie, her stumpy figure going from card to card, began her sibyline recital. Gweneth, half amused, half serious, listened.

It was a strange fortune, considering the age and beauty

of the receiver, for there was no word of love in it, hence it is to be supposed that Christie did not tell all the cards told.

The chief events were that there was a fortune coming to Gweneth from over the sea; that she would soon, probably, make a long journey.

"What!" ejaculated the girl, "leave Inesscauld? Mamma would never do that—or could not."

Christie had again dealt the cards. As her eyes marked a whole succession of spades, a gravity settled on the time-worn countenance.

"Black daithes," she murmured to herself. "God help the bairn—black daithes!"

"Well, Christie," queried Gweneth, "what do all these say? The same thing? A fortune from over the water? A journey?"

"Ay, Mees Gwen, they say a' that; also ye'll have great joy, and sorrow, too. 'Deed, but that's the lot o' a', an' hoo could we tell we were happy if we ken'd na sorrow?"

"And what is the sorrow, Christie?"

"Na, I canna pierce the veil of footurity to tell ye that much, nor the joy either; but it's na yet, lassie, so dinna fash yersel'; it's na yet," she added, somewhat hurriedly, it seemed almost nervously, gathering the cards together. "Noo for ye weesh. Ye maun weesh a' the while ye shuffle, but let nane ken what it is."

Gweneth's wish was that the storm would cause no wrecks that night, and the cards refused it her.

Scarcely had Christie told her the result, than the bell, placed by Mrs. Fane's side, rang, showing she was awake. Gweneth sprung to her feet, the old servant exclaiming:

"Mees Gwen, there's na need to fash the meestress wi' this nonsense. It's a' foolishness. Dinna ye believe a word."

"Only," smiled Gweneth, as she hastened from the kitchen, "that a fortune is coming over the sea. Bring the candles, Christie, please."

The old Highland servant did not at once comply.

"A strange fortune," she murmured, mechanically spreading the cards on the table—"a strange and a sair ane. There are bright cards and love eno', but the dark anes are the maist—the dark anes o' sorrow an' tears. Those bonny een will hae to sairly greet—whew!" as a sudden fierce rush of wind, which had been only fitfully moaning and sighing until now, shook the window and rattled the door-latch, "the storm is comin'. It'll be awfu', I reckon, ere the morn."

From that wild, tearing gust, gradually but surely the tempest accumulated force, until it broke with fearful and awing fury about midnight.

Gweneth could not sleep. She was awakened from her first slumber by a terrible drive of wind, which seemed to threaten the annihilation of the cottage, sheltered as it was.

To close her eyes again was impossible. Her bed-chamber adjoined Mrs. Fane's, with a door communicating. It had been her mother's wish that this should be.

"It is ill for the healthful to sleep with the sick," remarked Mrs. Fane, when Gweneth made protest.

Neither would she consent to the door being left open. Did she desire aid during the night, which she rarely did, a bell might be placed by the bedside which she could ring.

Upon this arrangement Mrs. Fane was firm.

Lying awake now, the young girl heard in the pauses of the storm her mother moving in her bed; so, quitting her own, she went softly into the other room, where always a night-light burned. But whether the poor lady had only moved in her slumber, or desired Gweneth to imagine so, when the girl leaned over the pillow she found her with eyes closed, breathing peacefully.

Stealing quietly back to her own chamber, Gweneth thought whether she should go to Christie for company; but a recollection of the old lady's assertion that "Gin I be ance asleep, I dinna fancy, if the end o' the world were to come, it 'ud waken me till the morn," she decided not to make the useless experiment, but, wrapping a plaid around her, drew aside the curtain, and looked forth at the night.

The first thing that struck her was the lonesome desolateness of the place, where only the warring elements seemed to live. The tempest was at its height, there were no trees to sway and toss, telling how fierce was the rushing wind; but there were the fierce waves, which broke with a roar like thunder upon the beach, the mighty cliffs taking the echo up and flinging it one to the other; also by the masses of dark wrack-cloud, which flew swiftly across the moon, the light from which fell in fitful flashes upon the storm-tossed ocean.

Suddenly her wish of that evening recurred to her, and mutely she prayed that it would come true, despite Christie's cards. Even as she thought, she gave a startled cry, and clutched with both hands the sill against which she leaned.

The moon had flashed its rays down between two masses of cloud, sending a broad band of silver light upon the boiling waters, and there in their very midst, rolling sometimes in view, sometimes vanishing in some deep, watery abyss, Gweneth perceived a ship.

The clouds did not close over the moon so soon as previously, and breathlessly Gweneth watched the black hull and spars, growing nervous and hysterical as she thought of the many souls on board, and the peril they were in.

To her, the vessel appeared driving due south, with a slight tendency to approach the shore. She trembled with terror, yet she could not remove her eyes from the small speck, tossed and driven as in sport by the leviathan billows.

Then the clouds swept on, veiling the moon, and all was dark. To *know* the vessel was there, and not see it, was worse than beholding it, and Gweneth dropped on her knees, too agitated to stand, her eyes straining through the darkness in the direction she had last seen the ill-fated ship.

Would it still be there, or visible, when the moon shone again? How long—how very long—it was coming! Would the light come never?

The deep darkness, the tearing hurricane of wind, the uncertainty respecting the ship, letting Gweneth's imagination run riot, the fear and suspense began to grow insupportable; she gave one or two convulsive sobs, longing to cry aloud, but could not. She felt her loneliness too much to bear.

Just then there came a light, but not of the moon; a flash, and a report, which arose above the howl of the tempest.

A minute-gun!

Gweneth uttered a cry, while the words came to her mind—

> A ship in distress, that cannot live
> In such a stormy sea.

Just then she heard a movement in the room across the little passage. Christie was up. In a second the girl was in the old servant's chamber.

"Oh, Christie!" she cried, "there is a vessel in distress. Did you hear the gun? What can we do?"

"Do, lassie? What could we, but bide and pray? It's a sair sight, and an awfu' night. If help can be given there are they who'll gie it. We, lassie, would but be in the way."

"Look! look!" exclaimed Gweneth, pulling her to the window, "the light is coming again."

Even as she spoke, the moon flashed out, the tumultuous waters were again visible; also the vessel rolling, pitching, heeling over, nearer, fearfully nearer the shore. Another gun, then the ill-fated vessel disappeared round the headland in the direction of Scartliff.

Gweneth clinging to Christie, the two waited and watched. But when the moon once more unveiled her face, there was nothing.

"She ha' weathered the headland," said Christie, "and maybe she is safe."

"Pray Heaven it is so," murmured Gweneth.

Only when the hurricane had expended its force did she return to her bed, where, chilled and exhausted, she soon fell into a deep sleep.

She awoke somewhat late for her, for usually she was up shortly after dawn. Her first thought was of the ship and the tempest, which she felt sure had caused its destruction. Now a brilliant sun inundated her room, and, pulling aside the curtains, she could scarcely believe the scene of a few hours ago possible, as she beheld the ocean sparkling in the golden light of day.

Dressing quickly, she descended to the kitchen, where Christie was already up and doing.

"Ye're late the morn, mees," remarked the old woman. "An' it's no' to be wondered at, after sic a night."

"I'm sorry I'm late," said Gweneth. "Have you heard anything about the ship, Christie?"

"Oo, ay. I just stepped down to the clachen to hear the news o' the storm."

"And was she wrecked?" asked Gweneth, clasping her hands instinctively.

"'Deed was she. She drove and drove before the wind, until she went ashore on the rocks aboon Scartliff; but, praised be to the mercy o' God, maist o' the puir bodies aboard her were saved, if not a' o' them, only it's not quite known yet. The sheep just went to rack."

"Oh," laughed out Gweneth, gayly, "I do not care anything for the ship, if the crew were rescued."

"An' wha, mees, are ye ganging noo?" as Gweneth approached the latched door.

"Down to the shore," was the merry rejoinder. "Don't you remember, Christie, you said a fortune was coming to me o'er the sea? Suppose I should find a fine chest of gold?"

"'Deed an' ye did, Mees Gwen, the preventeeve folk, who are ever putting their noses in wha they are no' wanted, would tak' it for their ain."

The door closed on her last words, and, as bright as the morning, Gweneth went dancing along the path to the beach.

The knowledge that probably no lives had been lost had put her in excellent spirits, to which the invigorating sea breeze added.

She met no one, the fishers having gone over to Scartliff.

"If I had not been so late, I would have gone also," thought Gweneth, standing on the shore under the beetling cliffs, and gazing seaward, where not a sail of the tiniest dimensions broke the watery expanse.

It was a great temptation. Gweneth had heard of wrecks along that coast, but had not seen one.

Scartliff was not so distant. She wondered if she were to climb the bowlders, which, extending at the foot of the headland, divided the small bay she was in from the next, whether she should be able to see anything.

Performance followed swiftly upon thought.

The rocks were soon reached, and in a few seconds she was looking over the rugged barrier; but not toward the towering headlands of Scartliff. A much nearer object of interest in the next bay had attracted her attention.

CHAPTER III.

HALF DROWNED.

WHAT was it Gweneth had seen?

A man lying just below her among the rocks, against which his shoulders partly rested; a man who was no inhabitant of Inesscauld; but whom she guessed at once was one of the crew or passengers of the wrecked ship.

The only garments he wore—a shirt and trousers—were saturated with water, and clinging to their wearer's form. The dark hair fell lankly down the sides of the pallid face, the eyes of which were closed.

A shiver ran through Gweneth, a shiver of fear. She could not move. Grasping the rock, she could but look at her discovery—not a chest of gold, but possibly a drowned man.

Speedily her courage came stealing back, and she drew nearer, bending from the rocks to look at him.

He was a man of about three-and-thirty, with handsome, well-cut features. Even in unconsciousness, marked with a singular gravity, and, it might be, care, on the broad, clear brow and shapely lips, which the mustache, being attenuated by the salt water, failed to hide.

Was he dead? No; she felt convinced he was not. But if aid were not speedy he soon might be. Possibly he was dying—dying for lack of help.

The idea banished all Gweneth's nervous dread. Springing from bowlder to bowlder onto the firm patch of sand upon which the man lay, kneeling, she lifted one of his hands, clasping it in her own. How icy cold it was—but the icy coldness of life, not death. She must procure assistance at once. She only paused lightly with her slender fingers to remove the lank hair from over the pallid brows.

As she did so, she felt the fingers of the hand she held close round hers, and two handsome golden-brown eyes looked with dreamy vagueness and wonder into her own.

"Where am I? What has happened?" came faintly through the blue-white lips.

"Do you forget," said Gweneth, gently, "the terrible storm? I think you must have been on board the ship that was wrecked."

A moment he was silent, his eyes fixed on hers. Evidently he was trying to recollect. He endeavored to raise his hand to his forehead, but it dropped feebly down again.

"Yes," he murmured, "it is coming back—slowly. The storm—the poor mother—and her child—I tried to save them—and was—washed overboard. Were—they—saved?"

Before Gweneth could reply, his eyes once more closed, he

drew a deep sigh, and sunk back against the hard bowlder from which he had partially risen—or would have done so had not Gweneth quickly interposed her arm, upon which his head a moment rested, then dropped as if grateful for the softer pillow against her shoulder.

The sense of protecting is very sweet to a woman, who, when true, is as the guardian angel of the human race.

A thrill ran through Gweneth as she regarded the pale, handsome face resting on her bosom. From that instant its owner possessed a strange interest to her.

His weakness increased her strength. She knew he was dependent upon her, and from that instant took him, as it were, under her protection; from that instant she felt his welfare and recovery had become her duty.

She had heard that those who had been almost drowned should be placed in a warm bed, with warm blankets and have warm drinks. At her mother's he should have them all, and every care. The difficulty was how to get him there? In vain she looked seaward; not a boat was in sight.

What could she do? Were she to leave him to seek help, what might happen before she returned? Suddenly a new terror seized her. The tide was coming in; before she could possibly return it would have reached him.

It might revive him; but suppose he was so injured, as she feared, that he could not drag himself beyond its reach?

Gweneth, giddy at the awful idea, unconsciously uttered a cry for help. At the sound, the man again opened his eyes, turning them upon her.

"Who are you?" he asked, faintly. "Where am I?"

"At Inesscauld," answered Gweneth, eagerly; "where I live. You have been wrecked. I fear you are hurt; but the tide is coming in, and you must move from this spot before it reaches it. Do you think you can get up, or crawl, with my help? Oh, try! Pray, try!"

"I would try anything for such a voice and so sweet a face," was the response, uttered in a manner that deprived the words of all offense. "You are very kind; but I am bruised from head to heel."

Nevertheless, he made an effort to rise upon his knees.

For a moment Gweneth thought he would succeed; but a death-like pallor spread over his features, which were convulsed with sharp pain, and he dropped back with a groan.

"Oh!" cried Gweneth, "what am I to do?"

"Leave me. In mercy do not risk your own sweet young life for mine; it is not worth it. Heaven knows, but to leave me here to die might prove the kindest act of the two."

"You must not talk like that," ejaculated Gweneth, indignantly; "it is sinful. But," with gentleness, "you are hurt and suffering; you know not what you say; but I will not leave you. No, indeed; I will save you."

The stranger did not speak at once; the expression in his handsome eyes, however, was one of singular tenderness and admiration. Then he said:

"I am so sorry to cause you all this trouble. I repeat, I am

not worth it. Life may not be an unmixed pleasure to some people, you know; still, let me try again."

Doing so, he proceeded, with Gweneth's aid, to lift himself so as to sit upon the bowlder against which he had been leaning, but she marked that his teeth, pressed on his under-lip, had produced a tiny crimson line.

"It is my left ankle," he said. "It is either sprained or broken. I fear I cannot walk."

"I have it!" cried Gweneth, seized by a sudden idea. "There are boats in the next bay; I'll bring one round, you might then crawl to it."

"I will try," he answered, with a smile which seemed to lighten his countenance like sunshine. "I'll do anything to free you from your distress about me, a stranger."

"In this world no one should be a stranger to the other," retorted Gweneth; "we are all brothers—so mamma says."

"Your mother must be a good woman."

"She is," answered Gweneth, innocently; "one of the kindest, the best. Now, can you, do you think, remain as you are until I bring the boat?"

"Yes; do not worry, pray. Yes, indeed."

Thus assured, aware there was no time to lose, Gweneth sprung up the rocks; the stranger watched her light, graceful figure with an interest so deep it seemed almost sad.

"What a splendid girl! What a sweet, innocent countenance! Oh, that the world so soon may ruin, mar, and make but as a piece with the rest so fair a commencement!"

Meanwhile, Gweneth had surmounted the rocky barrier, and was descending the other side, when, to her joy, she perceived two fishers coming across the sands. A second glance told her they were Donald and his son.

Quickly attracting their attention, running toward them, she rapidly told them her need.

"An' will ye come wi' us, mees, ava?" asked the younger.

"No, Alan; I'll be quicker over the sands. Only hasten, pray hasten, for the poor fellow is in sore need!"

And, indeed, she found it true; for on again scaling the rocks, she perceived he had slipped from the bowlder, and was lying on the sand again, unconscious.

Donald and his son easily lifted him into the boat, not, however, without eliciting more than one feeble moan.

"An' wha shall we tak' him—to the village?"

"No," replied Gweneth; "to our cottage, Donald. Christie, you know, is the best nurse and doctor in the place."

"We a' ken that weel. An' weel ye no step int' the boat yoursel'?"

"No; I will run home and prepare them for your coming. I'll be quicker than you."

Christie was busy getting breakfast when, flushed, and breathless, Gweneth ran in with her wonderful news.

"An' do ye say he's bein' brought here, Mees Gwen?" ejaculated the old woman. "Was there no place in the hamlet he could be ta'en to?"

"None where he could obtain such care and nursing as

you can give him, Christie; and he needs good nursing, for he's very ill."

"An' what will ye mither say to it?"

"Just what I do, Christie. I am going to tell her."

"Did I not do right, mamma?" questioned Gweneth, when her tale was told.

"You followed the dictates of a generous heart, darling, then how can I say you did wrong? Though at times the doing so is dangerous. Still, yes, you were right, Gweneth; he may obtain more care here than among the fishers."

So the half-drowned stranger was laid in the bed of the spare room, and Christie at once installed herself as his nurse—resolutely, however, shutting the door upon Gweneth.

"Bide a wee," she exclaimed. "When he's better, an' weel eno' to be fiddle-faddled ower, then it may be your turn; but noo it's I who maun cure the callant, an' I'll no be interfered wi'."

So Gweneth had to content herself with as many bulletins as Christie, who was arbitrary enough sometimes, chose to give her, and long for the day when the patient would be convalescent and ready to be "fiddle-faddled ower," little divining that the object of her solicitude was, even in his pain, thinking of her sweet, bonny face more than was good for him, and craving more than once for a glimpse of it.

When he ventured upon queries respecting the household, he found Christie very reticent. Indeed, the better he grew, the more curt she became. Once coming in and finding him asleep, she stood looking down upon him, her countenance grave and puckered. Then, *sotto voce*, she exclaimed:

"Ye're a handsome callant, an' a gentleman—there's na doubt aboot it. But it's no the bonniest face that covers the best heart. Can ye be the fortune that was to come to our lassie from ower the sea? Or is it you that's to bring the trouble upon her, and the tears to the e'e that has na greeted for mair na a bairn's grief yet? If that be sae, then would that the say—cruel as it is—had kept ye to itsel' when it had got ye, or that these auld hands had never sought to cure ye."

Down at Scartliff matters had progressed more favorably. The crew and passengers had all been rescued from the wreck, most of them having proceeded the next day to the larger towns south, where they could procure better accommodation than the tiny fishing hamlet could afford. Among them had gone the ship's surgeon, as Donald found when he went to seek his aid for Fairfax Drayton, lying "sae sairly hurt" at Mrs. Fane's. So the sick man had to put up with Christie's doctoring, which, perhaps, on the whole, was fortunate, as she was clever in the use of "auld wives' simples," and the stranger was not the first she had tended who had been bruised and beaten sore by the waves and rocks.

"Whyfore could ye no ha'e bided in the ship as the rest?" she remarked, grimly; "then ye'd ha'e been saved like the rest. Dinna ye ken that them as seek to save their life may e'en lose it?"

"Heaven knows I did not seek to save mine," smiled Drayton, pleasantly; "we rarely do seek to save that which is of little value."

Later on, Christie apologized.

"I beg ye pardon," she said. "Ye did brawly and nobly. May all the actions of your life be conformable til't."

Christie could not account for it herself, but the advent of this stranger seemed to occasion her an unexplainable anxiety respecting Gweneth. Christie had been young herself once, and, shrewd and observant, knew how inflammable is youth.

She might have been even more anxious had she been aware how eagerly Fairfax Drayton was wishing again to look upon the face of the girl who undoubtedly had saved his life. How the sound of her fresh, clear voice in the cottage soothed his restlessness and pain! When he caught those accents he would lie quiet, listening. Sometimes, however, he would sigh, and those lines of trouble and care which gave so attractive an expression to his face, and which unconsciousness could not obliterate, grew deeper and deeper.

And Gweneth, was she not equally longing to see him? It seemed scarcely just that this life she had plucked from the sea she should have no part in nursing back to health. Yet she knew her time must come, and tried to wait patiently.

In a week it came. Pale and feeble yet, unable to walk without Christie's strong arm, Fairfax Drayton received his nurse's permission to descend for an hour to the sitting-room, and make his kind hostess's acquaintance.

When Fairfax did so, he was struck by her beauty, and was full of wonderment at finding her in such a home. There is a freemasonry between members of the same social status, and he recognized in Mrs. Fane one who possibly had once belonged to a sphere even above his own. The graceful, easy dignity, the felicity of expression, the ability of using the right word in the right place, are *not* born in people; the rough material may be there, but it requires Society's polish to produce perfection.

Mrs. Fane no less recognized an equal in the stranger her roof had sheltered, and was instantly prepossessed by the handsome, thoughtful countenance, the brave, honest, yet gentle expression of the eyes, the tender deference of manner.

"Pray do not thank us," she smiled; "it is a pleasure for which we have every right to be grateful. We have so little opportunity here for practicing the Christian virtues. I regret that being—as I have been—a confirmed invalid for years, I personally can do so little."

The hour grew into two, during which Fairfax Drayton felt in duty bound to introduce himself in more than name.

He had been an only son, and, on coming of age, had inherited a fair fortune, which had made him his own master, answerable to no one for his actions.

For the last five years he had been a traveler, visiting many countries. He was returning from a tour through the Western States of America when this accident had happened.

Then the conversation drifted to London, Paris, even Rome; and Gweneth, sitting listening, heard her mother talk about each, as if they were well known to her, and saw an animation on the pale cheek and sparkle in the eyes.

When Christie, the inexorable, marched in to order her patient upstairs for beef-tea and rest, she too was surprised at the change in her mistress.

Fairfax disposed of, Christie returned to the sitting-room.

"The talk wi' the laddie ha'e done ye gude, it seems, mem," she remarked.

"Yes, Christie; he has recalled scenes and places where once I was very happy. Besides, I have discovered one thing that pleases me—I am never wrong in reading faces. Fairfax Drayton is a good man and an honorable; never could the reverse lurk behind such features."

Meanwhile, Gweneth, leaning on the wall gazing seaward, felt her turn had not come yet. Save the first earnest words of gratitude, Fairfax Drayton had scarcely again addressed her. But how those words had thrilled and glowed within her! how the light of those golden-brown eyes had seemed to kindle a warmth in her breast it had not known previously!

After a few days Fairfax Drayton grew strong enough to rebel against old Christie's commands; he forswore beef-tea, and refused to be kept within doors.

The weather was fine and balmy; he would go to the shore or the heights. Terribly lame still, he could yet hobble with the aid of a stick.

It was but natural that Gweneth, who knew every inch of Inesscauld, should be his guide. At first they went short distances, but soon these were extended, and when Fairfax Drayton's countenance betrayed the fatigue his lips denied, there were her young shoulders, or young arm, for his support.

At first Gweneth had been somewhat nervous of this new friend—the only real one she had ever had; but there was that attraction in his manner, in his face, that speedily assured her, and she talked and laughed with all the unconstraint of girlhood's innocence; and Fairfax Drayton gazed and listened as one who hears sweet music.

One day on their return, as they parted at the gate, Gweneth having to go down to the village, she looked up at him, putting her hand on his with a child-like confidence that, as she uttered some simple sentence, sent a quiver through every nerve, followed by a sharp heart-pang.

Going to his room, he flung himself into a chair, and exclaimed in accents almost of agony:

"Oh, Heaven! do not let me love her!" Then, more earnestly still, with sudden fear: "Do not let *her* love *me!*"

A moment after he had sprung up with a laugh.

"Pshaw! what folly!" he ejaculated. "She is but a child—an unsophisticated child, while I am a man, old in thought, if not in years—a man," he added, bitterly, "who was to dree his weird!"

CHAPTER IV.

DANGER.

"SHE is an innocent, unsophisticated girl; I, a man old, if not in years, who has to dree his weird."

From the truth in those words Fairfax Drayton drew his strength. Was the foundation on sand or rock? Nothing is easier than self-deception. For four years he had traveled here, there, over the globe's surface, possessing no settled home, a solitary wanderer, loving no one, loved by none.

Such a life was not according to his nature. A pleasant home, bright fireside, with loved and loving ones about him, was a paradise for which he often had craved, but which he had resigned all hope of ever possessing.

There was a dark corner in his life that had imprinted those lines on his features, and raised an insuperable barrier between himself and a pure woman's love.

Of the wealth he had inherited he did not expend a third. He possessed neither extravagant nor luxurious tastes. To have expended it upon others whom he loved would have been a pleasure; to do so upon himself, but a trouble.

Many a deserving charity received a check for a high sum, never dreaming it owed it to a man's misery; that the real benefactor was the dark corner in Fairfax Drayton's existence, which henceforth was and must be shadowed.

But suddenly, almost, as it were, through the portals of death, Destiny had cast him ashore at Inesscauld, at Gweneth Fane's feet. His eyes had opened out of oblivion to rest upon her sweet face, and even then, though chilled by exposure, his heart had heaved and warmed beneath her glance.

Sickness and pain render one selfish, self-absorbed. Hence, for a space, Fairfax Drayton did not try to analyze that first warm thrill; indeed, was but half conscious of it. He thought Gweneth's the fairest girl's face, fullest of truth and goodness, he had ever beheld.

He would have much liked to have exchanged Christie's grim, shrewd, honest one for it. It was pleasant, and soothed his pain, to listen to her bright voice in the cottage or garden, sometimes subdued for fear of disturbing him, Christie having announced that the "drooned mon" was asleep.

Once on waking, he found his room had been made quite bright and gay with heather. He had read Christie sufficiently well to be sure she had not tramped over the hills thus to beautify his chamber, and guessed instantly whose slender fingers had gathered the rich purple blooms.

Nevertheless, when Christie came in, he thanked her for her labor of kindness.

"You are indeed a skillful nurse," he said, "for you are aware how often pleasing a patient's eyes conduces to the cure of his body."

At which Christie, holding a small tray, whereon was a cup of beef-tea, halting, regarded him as if she fancied he had suddenly gone daft. Then, following the direction of his glance, had opened wide her eyes, evidently beholding the heather for the first time.

"I gang and pu' the heather?" she said. "My certie, but there's na time in my day for sic idleness." Then, checking herself, added: "Aweel, let it bide. It grows close to our garden wa', sa there's na trouble to pu' a han'fu'. Ye might a'most lean o't o' your window, and pu' it ye'sel'."

"That would not be half as pleasant," smiled her patient, "as the knowing some kind hand had pu'ed it for me."

Christie made no response, but handed the beef-tea.

And, indeed, Fairfax required no word of hers to tell him that Gweneth had gathered the heather, and while he slept decorated his room; a refinement of thought which would never have entered honest, hard-working old Christie's brain.

He was right; when Mrs. Fane was confined to her bed, as was often the case, Gweneth speedily filled vase and glass with heather.

But when she had brought a handsome bunch to Christie to treat in the same fashion her patient's room, the old woman had exclaimed:

"Hoot, toot! Tak' it awa', lassie. He's a mon, na a puir sick leddie. It's beef-tea, na heather, he's wanting."

So Gweneth, biding her time, slipped in, filling the vases herself, going on tiptoe not to arouse the sleeper.

Later on, when Fairfax was up, he took a small spray of white heather and put it carefully away, as a memento of his life having been saved, and by whom, never dreaming that the tiny spray would one day be dearer to him than life itself, and that never was he to part with it until death.

All this was in the unreadable future. Now, as convalescence approached, he only was conscious of the peaceful rest of the Arab when, after a day's traveling across the arid desert, he sinks down in the grateful shade of some green oasis.

It was during those walks, with Gweneth as companion and guide, that he began to be conscious of a new sensation stirring through him, as when the spirit of God passed over soulless chaos. The confidence of her glance, the easy unconstraint with which she recounted the simple sayings and doings of Inesscauld, the readiness with which she lent him arm or shoulder to lean upon, the pretty girlish gravity with which she put her veto upon his walking distances until he was stronger; indeed, taking him and his well-doing quite under her protection, as the right of one who had saved his life, had a subtle charm for the weary, solitary wanderer, this man who had to dree an evidently sad weird, which

was no less dangerous because he was ignorant of its depth and force.

And if it were dangerous to Fairfax Drayton, how much more, or at least equally, was it so to Gweneth? A girl's heart is as the bud of the rose; gradually, unconsciously, it expands its delicate leaves without restraint before the sun of love; it bathes itself in its golden light, until a bee nestles in its fair, perfumed bosom; a new existence seems to thrill through its cells, and then the sweet secret of love is learned, either for weal or woe.

So matters had been until Fairfax Drayton, a world-wise man, had seen in the girl's eyes, on that occasion when they parted at the gate, a something, a vague revelation of the possible, which had startled him with a sudden dread.

It was on the morning following that, hearing Gweneth in the garden, he came limping from the parlor, where he had been conversing with Mrs. Fane, and joined her. He was yet thin, and pale, too, from sickness, while his injured ankle made the aid of a stick imperative.

"And where are we to go this morning?" he asked, pleasantly. "You are my guide; I leave all to you."

Gweneth laughed, then looked serious.

"I do not know whether I ought to take you where I must go to-day," she replied. "You might not care."

"I should, I think, care for anything that interests you," he rejoined. "But does it do so?"

"Oh, yes," with a quick glance upward, "it does very much, or I should not go."

"Is it to visit the sick, or——"

"Oh, no, no—not that!" exclaimed Gweneth. Then she added, "Come and see."

She lifted a basket which stood on the path, full of heather and the hardy flowers of the garden.

Fairfax followed, a little curious. He did not mind much where he went, if she were his companion, and side by side they proceeded down the narrow path, the sunshine all around, and the fresh sea-breeze making Gweneth's stray tresses quiver, and fluttering her skirt about her small feet.

As they went, old Christie, coming to the door, watched them, her withered hand shading her eyes; then, in lieu of returning to her kitchen, she entered the parlor.

"Mebbe, mem, ye'll think it na beesiness o' mine," she said, addressing Mrs. Fane, who had taken up a book; "an' if sae ye'll forgi'e me, as it's the interest I take in the dear lassie, Mees Gwen; but dinna ye fancy Mr. Drayton finds mair pleasure in her societee than in any ither?"

The smile that passed over Mrs. Fane's features proved that the idea was not new to her.

"And if he does, Christie," she remarked, "where is the harm?"

"The harm! 'Deed, mem, I see none if he can but prove himsel' worthy Mees Gwen; but it would be a sair thing did he win the lassie's heart, and he no worthy."

"Do not fear that, Christie, woman; my Gwen is not of

such inflammable stuff," remarked Mrs. Fane, pleasantly. "She does not, I believe, yet know the meaning of love, though in time it may come; and should it come for Fairfax Drayton, would it be, do you think, an ill thing?"

"Na, na! He's braw and gude on the surface, and it may be mair than seeming; still, he came but as a piece o' wrack, tossed oop by the tide, mem. I'm thinking ye ken little aboot him, save what he tells ye; and men—na, women either, for that matter—would speak the waur o' themsel'."

"No, indeed," laughed Mrs. Fane. "I suspect none of us would do that. But a man's countenance often introduces him more truly than his tone or words. Trust me, our guest is a true and honorable gentleman."

"He looks sae," remarked Christie, dryly.

"And is so," smiled her mistress. "My good old friend—for friend you have been to me," proceeded Mrs. Fane, seriously—"more than once I have almost fancied the coming of this young man has been by God's mercy. My anxiety as to my child's future you know. A confirmed invalid, who cannot reckon upon many years' life——"

"Hoot, toot!" interpolated Christie. "Hanging doors bide lang."

"And," proceeded Mrs. Fane, "the only relation my Gweneth has, it is a daily trouble to me, the thought of her loneliness when I am gone. Should I, then, drive from my door one who may be more to her than even I am now? Where else will she have a chance of meeting one who is her equal, except by chance? My unfortunate malady prevents my taking her into the busier haunts of men; while"—with a shrinking shiver—"I have no inclination to do so."

"If he be all he says, there is na reason, that I see, that he should na be Mees Gwen's Jo——"

"Be certain, Christie, of this," put in Mrs. Fane: "he will never call my Gwen wife until he has proved beyond doubt that he is worthy."

"I'm glad I spoke, as noo I'm satisfied," said the old woman. "I was fearing whether he'd spirit her awa' fra under our noses before we could say ay or nay."

"You romantic old Hieland body," laughed Mrs. Fane, pleasantly. "Fairfax Drayton is not the man to return ingratitude to the roof that has sheltered him. Why should he? There, there! if it is to be—and I cannot help but wish it, for my child's sake—the seed will but now be sown—it will want time, at least with Gweneth, to grow to fruition."

"Ye ken best, mem; and I'm na saying but ye're reet. The gude Lord grant that ye are," she added, *sotto voce*, as, her mind relieved of what she had felt a serious responsibility, softly closing the door, she retired to her kitchen. "Weel, if it's dune naything else, it's dune gude to the meestress; it's lang since she's lookit sae bonnie. Truth, but the future o' the lassie maun be a constant care an' reflection to her."

Meanwhile, Gweneth and her companion had taken their way through the village, which, though half a mile from the sea, had a pronounced odor of marine algæ and haddies.

All the old folk had a smile, at times a word, for Gweneth, while the young divided their interest between both—the girl and her handsome companion—most of them thinking, probably, how coming events cast their shadows before.

"They'll mek a bonnie pair," remarked one old fisher, pausing in mending his net, as he sat on a cutty stool outside his cottage.

"Hoot, toot, mon! Canna the sea wash up a half-drooned mon, but Mees Gweneth maul grip him for her Jo?" was the retort.

Thus Inesscauld had settled the question which had not yet dawned on Gweneth. There was no constraint such as love brings in her voice as she chatted to Fairfax of matters which, having interest for her, at once gained interest for him.

A little beyond the village, Gweneth turned the base of the rising ground, and there, in a hollow of the land, roughly inclosed by a low wall of rugged pieces of rock, was the small burial-place of Inesscauld.

Bare of tree, bare of adornment, each grave marked only by a rude headstone, with the erectness of which the fierce storm winds had played havoc. Gate there was none, and the two, entering, moved along the grass-grown narrow path.

"Many bear a sad record, do they not?" said Gweneth, pausing, her hand on a headstone on which was the word "Drowned." "Yonder lie three generations—grandfather, father, and son; it was calm enough when they started fishing; but the wind veered, causing a sudden squall; so when the wife and mother went to the shore in the morn to look for the boat, she found just three dead bodies there. It nearly broke her heart."

The girl's voice had softened; at the end it broke a little; there were tears in her eyes.

Fairfax was silent, for, as he looked upon her, he was possessed by an emotion which made him fear speech.

What might he say?—what confess? Every nerve was quivering like a taut string when touched. Gweneth, however, had passed on, waiting for no comment. Recovering himself, he followed, saying:

"To those who go down to the sea in ships there is ever danger. I see you have, may I say? favorites here."

For Gweneth had been removing some withered flowers from some of the graves, replacing them with fresh, while other graves she passed unnoticed.

"It's not that," she answered; "but there are some of the people who think the pretty custom almost heathenish."

"If I had been washed ashore dead, not alive," said Fairfax, "I suppose my last resting-place would be in this quiet God's acre."

Gweneth looked quickly up at him. The idea had startled her. Then she answered:

"Yes. It was well it was not so, was it not?"

"The future must prove that," he replied, smiling

thoughtfully. "It seems strange, the idea of being buried out in this wild spot, with no tear shed for you."

"That is true," answered Gweneth, after a moment of grave reflection. "I did not know you then. I should not then have wept."

"Not then?" the words sprung unbidden from his lips. "Would you now?"

"Would I?" Her eyes were lifted to his in astonishment; there were tears in them. "Of course I would; but," smiling, "you must not lie in any grave here. No, indeed."

She had a pretty Scotch accent often in her way of speaking, caught from the fisher-folk, which Fairfax found particularly fascinating.

"Thanks to you, no," he remarked. "I wonder, if I had died, whether you would have put flowers on my grave?"

"I am sure of it. There would have been no one to prevent me," said Gweneth, whose basket was now empty. "And I should have been so sorry for you. My heart would have been full of pity."

"I wonder if I should have known?"

He looked down at her as she glanced up; then added:

"I am sure I should. I am certain. My spirit hovering near would have seen you; and, had it power, have blessed you for your kindness to one unknown."

"That is a nice thought," murmured Gweneth in a lower tone, after a second, "that the spirits can see what is done. That does not make death so sad, does it?"

They were leaving the graveyard now, and for awhile Fairfax remained thoughtfully silent. The small episode had convinced him of one thing. He need have no fear respecting Gweneth; she did not, nor was in the way, to love him—to return the fierce fire of his own passion, which, with so supreme an effort, he smothered out of sight. In that case might he enjoy this brief summer of happiness awhile longer, ere he plunged back into the "winter of his discontent."

No, she did not love him. She was too young to know what love was; and he—he was not the one destined to teach her. Was he glad—glad of her escape? Was he sorry? He told himself he was, but the most selfish animal on earth is man. Fairfax felt annoyed—disappointed.

"I have made you sad," broke in Gweneth's subdued tones, upon his reverie. "I feared I should. Some people always are depressed at the sight of graves. I wish I had not let you come."

"Indeed it was not that," he laughed. "I was thinking of other matters. Pray, let me carry your basket."

Without waiting permission, he took it from her; but in doing so, managed to entangle her fingers in his, and hold them a space, watching her face.

Not a shade in her fresh complexion deepened, the lashes never lowered; laughing, she remarked upon her own clumsiness. No; love had not awakened yet.

Going to the shore, they found Donald pushing off his boat.

"Would Miss Gwen and the gentleman like to come wi' him? It was a fine morning for a row, and he was ganging roond Inesscauld Ness."

They got in willingly, and soon were being rowed out to sea; then along the great Scottish coast, all the rich line of rock crowned by sweeping stretches of heather, brought out gloriously in the sunlight.

What a lazy, lotus existence it is, to lie on the seat of a boat, being rowed by another, and watch the sweet face of her who every minute is growing dearer and dearer to you.

"Why must it end? Why cannot we go on forever thus," thought Fairfax, "until we drift into eternity?"

Instead of ever, Donald, in little more than an hour, was heading his boat again into the bay of Inesscauld. Beaching it for the two to step out, he pushed off once more, bound for Scartliff. They stood watching him from the shore.

Fairfax was the first to break the silence.

"How often—often after I have gone away," he said, "shall I recall Inesscauld, and how happy I have been here."

"Gone away!"

The words were Gweneth's. They came in quick, startled tones. She was regarding him with eyes wide, interrogative.

"Of course," he smiled, forcedly. "You surely could not imagine I would impose upon your generosity forever? As it is, even with thanks I never can repay you."

Gweneth did not answer, only he heard a quick catch in the throat.

Was it a sob? Her eyes were now directed seaward. Every vestige of color had forsaken her cheek; an expression of a strange mental pain was on her features.

Until this moment it was evident she had never realized that Fairfax Drayton, who had so singularly entered into her life, must soon fade out of it, leaving a never-to-be-filled void.

There was a ringing in her ears, far away, like the fabulous mermaid-bells that rang under the waves. The land seemed suddenly to darken; tears were in her eyes which she must not let fall.

And Fairfax Drayton?

The earth apparently heaved beneath his feet; the world itself seemed reeling, his heart expanded to suffocation.

He was no longer in darkness, the light of truth had inundated his whole soul like a flood; that pale, startled, sorrow-struck girl-face had revealed it.

Whether consciously or not, Gweneth loved him. Oh, the supreme joy of that first knowledge! Then, with a mental, terrible cry, he thought:

"Oh, God! save me from what I would do!"

But the craving for the love of those we love is as the craving of the starving man for the bread on which his existence depends. What if it be stolen? His life, released

from a fearful agony, depends upon his eating it, and he eats.

No hand reached from heaven and plucked this temptation from Fairfax.

Gweneth stood mute, motionless, as the lamb bound for the sacrifice. Fairfax Drayton set his teeth, and gripped his hands, in the effort to fight down the human nature within him.

The flood checked in its course but rushes the more vehemently on when it sweeps away the barrier to its progress.

Fairfax Drayton, fighting his fight, glanced down at his companion, and saw a tear, which for a second had gemmed her long eyelash, quiver and roll slowly down the pale cheek.

CHAPTER V.

THE SQUIRE.

In the month of August, during a seasonable summer, which was not so rare years ago as now, Deepdale may have been said to have been in its glory. Only the trees which had first braved the cold kiss of early spring were beginning to change their hues, giving color to the masses of varied green in the noble sweeps of woodland, which served as rich settings to the verdant pasture-lands and fields of golden corn.

Pasture and corn were not the chief features of the landscape, but, as the name implied, the dales, as deep and picturesque as painter could desire, from whence upstarted the hills which formed the background. When the mists came creeping up or down, or the setting sun threw shafts of light across the clean cattle, splendid of eye and rugged of front, it made a scene worthy of the brush of Peter Graham.

Deepdale was a northern town of some importance. Around it were scattered small villages, farm-houses, and, nestling alone among their greenery, many estates.

The possessor of one of the handsomest of these was Evan Ascelin, popularly known as the squire.

Forty, or perhaps a litle over, as, on this fine hot August afternoon, Evan Ascelin rode slowly homeward through a green shady lane, he looked a good representative of the name, and of the typical frank, honest, honorable English country gentleman.

In two ways Evan Ascelin was not a typical English country gentleman: he neither preserved game nor hunted. Laughing, he used to remark that coming events cast their shadow before, and he was the shadow of those events when it would be recognized that the slaughter of half-tamed birds, or the mad ride after one wretched little creature, was not sport fitted for real men, or of which real men could be proud.

Big man of nearly six feet as he was, he would, as others have been recorded doing, stoop to lift a wounded butterfly from the path that it might not receive further hurt; but he did not, most illogically, start the next morning with artificial fly or live bait to hook unwary fish.

Such was Evan Ascelin, still termed "t' young squire," as in the best of humors—he rarely was in a bad one—he came out of the lane into the hot, broiling, unshaded road. Rising up in front of him, a mile yet distant, was his home, Ericfield, a handsome gray building, with east and west wings.

Between him and it extended a sea of leafy verdure, only broken by the thatched roof of a small cottage placed in a little garden, where cabbages and luxuriant French beans shouldered rose-bushes and hollyhocks.

On this hot afternoon the door stood open, the sun's rays making the flooring of red tile glow again, for the entrance gave at once into the living-room, a pattern of scrupulous cleanliness. On the broad, square hearth-place smoldered a few logs, over which was suspended a black kettle; by it was seated, in a cushioned Windsor chair, a tidy old dame, at work or dozing, while a fine boy of between three or four years old was lying on the floor a few feet off, drawing with a piece of rough chalk upon the red tiles, while he kicked and knocked his small heels together in the air.

There was a drowsy sense of peace and rest over all, which the slow beat of Ascelin's horse's hoofs did not disturb.

On reaching the gate, the squire paused, wiped his hot face, then, alighting, hitched his rein to the gate, and, walking up the path, crossed the threshold into the cottage.

His shadow, falling upon the floor, startled the old woman from her doze. Peering up, and recognizing her visitor, she rose hurriedly, dropping a courtesy.

"It be t' squire," she remarked. "I be gettin' old, squire, an' t' rare heat makes a body drowsy. Will yo' not coom in?" vigorously dusting the chair ere she put it forward.

"No, thanks," rejoined the squire; "I'm hastening home. My wife was telling me that a quart of milk now and again would be of service to you."

"Ah! but yo' good lady is a rare un to remember things when it is for t' poor. I'd be main glad, truly, squire, o' it."

"Then come every morning. My wife has given orders, I know, for you to have it."

"She forgettens naught, squire. May Heaven bless her!"

"Amen," said the squire, reverently raising his hat.

"Ah, squire, it's jest right to be grateful for so good and bonnie a wife as my lady. Such are rare ones."

"Trust me, I am grateful," smiled Evan Ascelin. "Sometimes, dame, I feel my happiness exceeds my deserts."

"Don't yo' go to say that, squire"—and the old dame held up her shriveled finger—"or mayhap yo'll put it in Providence's mind; and Providence'll take yo' at yo' word."

"I do not fear," laughed Evan Ascelin, amused. "One must, you know, always, speak the truth and shame——"

He stopped abruptly, his eyes upon the floor. For the first time he had noticed the young artist and his work.

"Why," he ejaculated, in surprise, "what is the youngster up to?"

"He do give me no end o' trouble, squire, that is sure," explained the old woman. "He's a rare un wi' his chalk. He's always at it; an' I can' stop un. The tiles are a' over his scribbling at times, they are."

"But he should not be stopped!" exclaimed the squire, gazing at the urchin, who, after a glance upward, on finding he had become the topic of conversation, had resumed his

drawing. He was a stalwart, handsome little fellow, with brown, silky curls massed over his head. His attire was of the simplest and poorest, though clean and tidy. "There's something in the boy. The ideas in those scribblings are clever—clever in one of his age. By the way, what is it?"

"I reckon, squire, he must be between three and four. Getten up, Bryan, and make yo' bow to th' squire."

But the boy only looked up with his large brown eyes.

"Let him be," said Evan Ascelin, growing strangely interested in the infant prodigy. "He is not your own?"

"Bless yo', no, squire."

"I meant," remarked the squire, hastily, "a grandson. Who are his parents?"

"That's more'n I know, squire. I only wish I did, an' could getten t' 'em. They owe me a bit o' money."

"I don't understand. Explain."

"Well, squire, it's just this: he's a nurse-child. Two years ago, one night when I was sitten all lone an' lorn, thinking of my old man, who'd been dead over a year, there come a knock at th' door. When I opened it, I saw a man theer a-moofled up, for 'twas rare cold. I was a bit afeared, for th' place is lonesome, 'specially when he coom in without a by yo' leave, an' shut th' door behind 'im.

"I s'pose I looked skeered, for un told me not to be frightened: he only wanted t' ask a question. An' th' question was, squire, whether I'd take a nurse-child if I were well paid.

"I was main in want o' money then, so I answered up at once I would, an' 'ad promised to say nowt about it—how it was brought, an' when. So t' next night t' man brought t' bairn asleep; an' pay weel for a time he did, though how t' money was sent, or who sent it, squire, I never knew more'n yo'. Thet's where it is, for three months ago no money came, an' none's ever come since, an' I can't tell where to send for 't, or t' send un back th' bairn."

"You would not mind doing the latter?"

"Not I, squire. Un's a good bairn eno'. But I'm getting old to look after un. He grows stronger as I grows weaker; besides, I'm no that rich I can keep un for nowt."

"Surely not. It's not quite fair to expect it of you," acquiesced the squire; then, *sotto voce*, regarding the child with gentle, pitying sadness: "Poor little man! The sins of the fathers—and mothers, too—are indeed visited upon the children. There," he continued aloud, putting silver in the old dame's palm, "that will go toward the youngster's keep. If his unnatural parents do not attend to his welfare, we must see what can be done. It must not fall upon you."

"Thank you kindly, squire," replied the dame, dropping a grateful courtesy. "I'd ha' said nowt about it, if you hadden asked."

"You did quite right, for the boy's advantage, as your own. My wife shall see to it," exclaimed Evan Ascelin, as he moved toward the door, casting, as he did so, a final glance at the young artist and his work. "Good-day."

"Good-day t' yo', squire, an' many thanks for th' milk."

Mounting his horse, Evan Ascelin rode on down the road at a slow pace. He was thoughtful to gravity, and yet at times a smile flickered over his features, occasioned, evidently, by some passing happy thought.

"Three months, and not a farthing sent to that poor old woman. It's too bad—it's shameful—shameful to her, shameful to the child whom they have abandoned—there's no doubt of that. Alas! alas! that the holy names of mother, father, should be given to such monsters!" he ejaculated, irately, striking at a drooping bough with his whip. "Perhaps they may regret it some day; the boy's full of talent—who can tell that it may not even be genius? it ought to be cultivated. By Heaven! it *shall* be cultivated—it shall not be sacrificed by these diabolical parents" (more irate). "To think of my Stanley—my brave, noble boy—bless his heart! —being in such a position. There, I'll speak to Claude about it; she always knows the right and proper thing to do."

Entering, through carriage-gates bearing the Ascelin coat-of-arms, an avenue of oaks, the gnarled branches of which arched above, the squire slightly quickened his pace, and emerged in front of the broad steps of the terrace of Ericfield. A groom who had heard his approach hastened forward to take the horse, when Evan proceeded to seek his wife.

He made no query as to her whereabouts, knowing possibly better than the groom, for it was the four o'clock tea-hour, and on such an afternoon he was sure he should not find his wife indoors. As he turned the western angle of the house, a child's laugh smote his ear, bringing a smile to his lip and a happy light into his English blue eyes.

One stride or two more, and the place he sought was in view—a lovely lawn, dotted here and there with bright flower-beds; two trees had been trained to serve as shade, beneath which were rustic seats and table, while in the center played a fountain, the pure water-lilies in the basin being contrasted with dark, rich-hued ferns on the margin; around the place, belting it in like a frame, were tall trees united by hedges.

Under one of the trees sat Evan Ascelin's wife. In years she may have been eight-and-twenty; her figure was slight but symmetrical, such as tea-gowns so gracefully become; though her hair was a chestnut-golden brown, her complexion was peculiarly fair, enhancing the darkness of a pair of liquid red-hazel eyes; the features were delicately cut, the nose classically shaped, as the small mouth beneath.

In a word, it was a face and form seen again and again in emblematical statuary, but very rarely in living forms; such a countenance might Ceres have possessed when smilingly she looked forth upon the land rich with golden grain.

Leaning forward, her elbow on the rustic arm of her chair, her hand supporting her chin, she was watching a lovely boy of between two and three years, attired in snowy white embroidery and blue sash, who was romping on the grass with a tame rabbit, which frisked and leaped, apparently enjoying the sun as much as his playfellow. At a little

distance stood the nurse, a young woman with a pleasant face and smile.

Evan Ascelin, as he gazed upon this charming scene of maternal love and domesticity, felt his eyes grow humid.

Was his happiness too great to last?—too much for mortal man to bear? At that moment he almost believed so.

"Great Heaven!" he murmured, as he thought of the abandoned child he had just left, "that there could exist parents who could bring shame and lifelong trouble upon their innocent offspring! Surely either in this world or the next their punishment must come."

As he approached the steps leading down to My Ladye's Garden, he gave a peculiar whistle. At the sound the child stopped in his play, looked up, then, with a cry of delight, scrambling to his feet, came running forward, the rabbit leaping in the rear.

"Papa, papa! dear papa!"

The strong hands were round the baby form, which, after a series of kisses, was mounted on papa's shoulder, while with proud, pleased eyes the wife and mother regarded both.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG ARTIST.

ABOUT four years previous to the events described in the last chapter, Evan Ascelin, staying in the south of France, made the acquaintance, as travelers do at times, of a resident. In this case, he was an elderly Englishman, living with his only child on the half pay of a captain in the army.

The chance conversation led to mutual liking. On many points Evan Ascelin found they were as one, the strongest being that high sense of honor which for many years was synonymous with the term "an officer and a gentleman."

Captain Durnsford asked his new friend home, making, like a true gentleman, neither apology for the humbleness of his dwelling nor his fare. His birth was as good, his line of ancestors as long, as the squire's own. The mere fact of poverty was no disgrace.

The squire, unaware of what Fate had in store for him, gladly went, and for the first time beheld Claude. From that moment the whole world—life itself—was changed to him. Never yet in the brilliant salons at home and abroad, where he had the entrée, had a woman ever stirred the calmness of his heart-beats.

Though he should have to wed one day, he told himself, with a sigh, he evidently was not a marrying man; and lo! here he was, with a suddenness that bewildered him, prostrate, metaphorically bound hand and foot, at the feet of this young girl, possessed of no ornament save her beauty.

Evan Ascelin asked for no more, wanted no more; he had met with her who represented to him domestic happiness. He turned sick and despaired at the mere thought that he "might fail to win her grace."

Claude was exceedingly delicate. It was for her health, the captain informed him, that they had come to the south of France to enjoy the milder, more equable climate. Her illness had been nothing serious, only a nervous disorder.

She was the sole being he had in the world to love. The two were utterly alone; when one went the other would be desolate; hence, as was natural, he had to be very tender with her.

"Very tender indeed," acquiesced Evan, mentally. He would have bitterly blamed him had he been other. How he wished that he had but the privilege of sharing the care! But with pleasure came pain. He could not hide from himself that Claude shrunk from him; that his attentions, his efforts to add to her comfort, always rendered her more nervous; indeed, he fancied she avoided his presence.

He was now a frequent visitor at the cottage, where Cap-

tain Durnsford gladly welcomed him; but frequently Claude would be absent until her father summoned her.

The squire's suspicion was correct. Claude did avoid him—shrink from him, but from no dislike. Once, as the father and daughter watched their visitor departing down the long road, Claude, who had been more than usually silent that evening, broke out with a sharp, low cry:

"Oh, papa, why do you let him come?" she exclaimed. "Why? Can you not see?"

"See what, child?" interrogated the old captain, shortly.

Claude covered her face with her slender hands.

"That he loves you?" he added.

"Yes," murmured the girl. "What shall I do?"

"Do? Marry him!"

"Marry him!" repeated Claude; her countenance was white and startled as she looked up. "I?"

"You; why not?" placing his hand on her arm. "When I am dead, you will be alone if I do not see you have some one to guard and cherish you before I go. He loves you; why should he not be the one?"

"Why? Have you thought of his position, father, his birth—"

"No greater than ours," broke in the captain. "There can be only one barrier—your not loving him. Is that possible? Speak truly. But pardon me, Claude; that you ever do."

The girl drooped her half-averted head as she answered:

"No; it is not possible."

"You love him?"

"Look at him, hear him, and say if one could help it, father."

"No; *I* love him—love him as a son, Claude; do you hear? It is you who must make him one to me."

"No, no!" she broke in; "do not ask that, or let me test the strength of his affection; let me tell him?"

With a low cry, but intense, the old man caught the girl's two wrists so sharply, so suddenly, that in terror her limbs failed, and she dropped on her knees.

"Not a word—not a syllable," he whispered, bending over her. "Remember, I have your oath. Yes; since I have seen he loves you, I have fostered his passion. One day—to-morrow, perhaps—I know he is all on fire to—he will speak; and, mark me, Claude, you must accept him. If blame there be, I take it on my shoulders. But there is no fear—none; you must make him happy, you must be his wife."

The next day, when the squire paid his usual visit to the cottage, for the first time, and to his delight, he found Claude in the sitting-room alone.

She was pale and nervous, but he had been too long waiting such an opportunity to allow it now to escape.

In a few minutes Claude was listening to a love as sincere, as single and noble, as it is rare. It carried away her scruples like a torrent the tender flowers on its edge. Dizzy with her great joy, those barriers once gone, she abandoned

herself to a passion which indeed was not stronger than her own.

She yielded, she told herself, to forces more powerful than she, and as she felt the squire's heart beating against hers, as she met the passionate, eager light of his eyes as they looked down into hers, when she felt his kisses fall on her brow, her eyes, her lips, she determined that such delirious happiness could not be cast away—that it was the past she would throw behind her out of sight, burying it deep, deep, that even its shadow as a memory should never cross her path or his.

From that moment Claude's delicacy and nervousness disappeared; she grew once again bright, healthy, cheerful. If the vaguest cloud rising out of that past approached her, she nestled closer to her lover's side, and it was gone.

They were married quietly, then Mr. and Mrs. Evan Ascelin started for their honeymoon. "It lasted a whole year," the squire laughed, for they made no haste to return.

At the end of that time, very suddenly, but very peacefully, Captain Durnsford died; he was buried in the little Protestant corner of the French cemetery; after which Evan Ascelin took his wife to Ericfield, which had been swept and garnished, decorated and much refurnished for her homecoming. Also for the advent of that tie which, if possible, was to draw the fond hearts of these two closer together.

"Nowhere else," had said the squire, "must their child be born than at Ericfield."

So there the squire's son and heir was born, causing much feasting and bell-ringing. From that hour to this, when husband and wife sat at afternoon tea in My Ladye's Garden, had been an unbroken course of love and happiness.

"My dear," remarked the squire, teacup in hand, his eyes on his heir, the rabbit and the nurse all disappearing into the house, "I want to enlist your aid in a work of charity."

"Do you think it will be a difficult task, Evan?" asked his wife, pleasantly. "Let me fill your cup."

"Difficult? Quite the contrary; I am easy on that score. The word charity is an instant passport to your favor, I know, especially when the recipient is a helpless child."

Claude turned toward him. It was evident her interest was enlisted already.

"Do you know the little fellow at old Mrs. Crannick's?" asked the squire.

"Of course I must have seen him," she said; "but he has not been brought to my special notice."

"He has to mine, in striking fashion," remarked the squire, entering at once upon a recital of his visit to the cottage.

Claude listened, it seemed eagerly, then:

"Poor little fellow," she said, sympathetically. "Yes, Evan, indeed you have interested me."

"My love, the youngster is a born genius," proceeded the squire enthusiastically. "I'm sure of it. Now, the question is, what's to be done? Mrs. Crannick, who finds it hard to keep herself, cannot be expected to keep the child."

"I will pay her, Evan."

"That generous," agreed the squire, though the plan scarcely hit in with his own. "But is Mrs. Crannick's quite the home to bring out artistic skill in a born genius?"

"Not quite," smiled Claude. "Evan, I perceive you have some generous plan of your own. I will suggest no other until I hear it."

"Well, then, my love, why not bring the child here? Why not let it be reared, educated at Ericfield, where his talent shall be fostered? Who knows, Claude, but in years to come we may be proud to be known as the first patrons of a second Sir Joshua or another David Wilkie? In a way, too, the child might be a companion for Stanley, eh? What do you say?"

Rising, his wife put her arms about his neck and laid her cheek against his. There were tears in her eyes.

"I say, Evan, that when a noble, generous, Christian act is to be done, you must not ask me the way, being able to do it better, so very much better, yourself. Let this child come, by all means, and if ever he be a great painter, he shall bless the hand that made his rugged path a smooth one."

So it was that little Bryan Thorold came to Ericfield.

When a good deed *was* to be performed, neither the squire nor Claude let the grass grow beneath his or her feet. A maid was instantly dispatched with some left-off clothes of the young heir in which to clothe the embryo artist, and bring him to his new home.

It was not without some difficulty, for he clung to his nurse more than she clung to him; but the parting was at last effected, though it was a shy, somewhat sullen little piece of humanity that stood, grasping the maid's dress, and peeping out at the squire and the fair young wife.

"Fetch Stanley," laughed Evan, "and the rabbit; the three youngsters will understand one another best."

So Stanley was fetched, and the two children eyed each other wonderingly and askance, until Claude, giving her handsome boy the cake-basket, bid him help and entertain his guest. Whereupon Stanley planted it between them, bidding "Ittle boy, take some tate."

Which Bryan did, and, friendship thus begun, the two sat amicably facing each other, the cake in the middle, and the rabbit slyly helping itself.

The squire, much amused, looked on, until, with a start, a great wonder came over his countenance, and, grasping his wife's arm, pointing to the children, he said:

"Look, Claude, look!"

"At what? What is it, dear?"

"The children; they are alike. Why, this is wonderful! They are so alike that, but for their difference of years, they might be twins! Do you observe it?"

"Yes."

The answer was so faint that he looked at her.

Every trace of color had fled his wife's cheeks, which had become of the pallid hue of death.

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERY.

At the sight of his wife's deathly pallor, the children were at once forgotten by the squire.

"Good heavens! my darling," he ejaculated, much concerned, putting his arm about her; "you are ill!"

"A little faint, that is all, Evan. Do not look so alarmed," trying to smile. "It is but the effect of the heat; it has been so overpowering to-day."

Her head had drooped on to his shoulder; she made no haste to raise it. Her hand, resting on his coat lapel, slightly trembled; but the color was coming back to her face.

As the pallor waned, he drew a deep breath of relief.

"Bravo! Now you are beginning to look again yourself. Yes, it has been overpoweringly hot. Your indisposition was so sudden you frightened me," stooping to kiss the lips back to warmer color. "I thought at first that my words had caused it; but I don't believe you heard what I said."

"What did you say, Evan?" she asked, after an imperceptible pause, during which her lips tightened as if overcoming some secret emotion, while her eyes no longer met his.

"I called your attention to the singular resemblance there is between Stanley and our *protégé*," he answered. "I own it startled me. It is a strange coincidence."

Claude at once rose from the reclining position, and bent her gaze on the two boys, with an eagerness she found it difficult to conceal. But the resemblance apparently no longer existed. The squire had caught them in profile, a predatory attack of the rabbit on the cake-basket had caused a change of position; the expression of the children was now totally different, and though the squire perceived a decided similarity, in which Claude agreed, it was scarcely of sufficient moment to be further commented upon or thought of by him.

The only way to drive crime and cruelty from a nation is to fill its children's hearts with kindness.

This was the squire's opinion, and his boy possessed a perfect menagerie of pets; the most petted of all being a Highland pony, which Stanley, making friendship rapidly after the nature of children, led Bryan off to see.

Claude's gaze followed the two tiny forms, the eldest nearly a head the tallest, until the trees hid them; then yet gazed, lost in thought.

"How grave you are, Claude," broke in her husband's voice.

"Do you, in your secret heart, disapprove of my bringing the boy into companionship with Stan? I am aware I do rash things sometimes."

She turned swiftly toward him as she replied:

"But not this time, Evan. *I* disapprove an act so generous? Do you not know me better? I would not have it otherwise. Poor—poor child, never to have known a parent's affection. Evan, that must be very terrible for the child and—and the mother."

The squire made an impatient movement.

"There, darling, I am not altogether with you," he said; "for the child, yes; I have no compassion for the mother."

Claude for a second time seemed to shrink slightly away from the speaker, then said:

"Might there not possibly be—be extenuating circumstances? There are sometimes, Evan. If there were, you would be the first, I feel, to compassionate."

"No." The squire shook his head. "Whatever a woman might do for her children I could, perhaps, forgive. But she who is the cause of their being brought into this world, and who then deserts them that she shall not suffer for her sin, would, Claude, receive no compassion from me."

"Is that not a little—just a little hard, Evan?" suggested his wife, timidly.

"I do not see it—I can't," he answered. "But there is one thing that surprises me, pet, that you should make yourself the champion of such people." He said it half in jest.

"Indeed, Evan," exclaimed his wife, hastily, "I am not their champion. I did not mean that. I would not be—I have no right to be. But you who cry 'Judge not' to all other sins, why so hard on this, which arises too often from a woman's folly—a woman's love?"

"My darling," laughed the squire, rising up, "if that is not championship, what is? But enough of the subject. It is no pleasant one, or fitting one for a pure woman to discuss. Let us go and see where the boys have got to."

Claude made no rejoinder, but rising, her hand resting on her husband's arm, together they quitted "My Ladye's Garden." But into the wife's life there had drifted a cloud. Was it to melt or darken?

It had certainly darkened considerably when Claude Ascelin soon after sat alone in her dressing-room, where she had come to dress for dinner. Her hands were tightly clasped together on her lap, her gaze was riveted upon the floor. Thoughts were swiftly flitting through her brain, of the nature of which none but she knew. Abruptly, they took shape in short, low-murmured, tortured sentences.

"It can't be. It is impossible—or too unlikely to be possible. Why should I build such monstrous phantoms in my mind, with no foundation? No foundation? Is that likeness none—the extraordinary likeness? Evan beheld it as rapidly as did I, and to me it came as a flash—a"—she spoke the word with effort—"revelation."

She was silent, then rising, began pacing to and fro.

"If—if the child is—is what this fearful suspicion whispered me, how has he been brought here?—and why? It is barbarous—cruel! Oh, why was I not permitted to tell Evan the truth at first? Why does this oath bind me? Despite what he says, I would trust him. It would kill him to renounce my love, as the losing of his would slay me."

She wrung her hands; her features betrayed the agony of her soul. Then suddenly, her fear having reached its climax, calmness came over her; she dropped back into her chair.

"Am I mad to torture myself thus upon a surmise—a vague probability? Probability? Absurd! There is none. I make a mountain out of this molehill. I will forget it"—with an outward movement of her hand; but quickly she added, with deep, impressive utterance—"no; rather, I will prove it. I *must* prove it; existence will be agony until I do! And if I do—if this child—"

She could proceed no further. Bending her face forward in her hands, she cried, with a sob:

"Oh, my God, help me—help me to keep this wretched secret, once kept, to the end!"

A tap at the door aroused her. Resuming her ordinary demeanor, she said, "Come in," and her maid entered.

During the process of dressing, Claude, with no more outward interest than the case warranted, inquired where the housekeeper had arranged for the little Bryan to sleep.

In a chamber not far from her own, on the third floor.

"You mean the one in the east wing?" said Claude, carelessly snapping a diamond bracelet on her white arm.

"Yes, ma'am."

"It is well; the child may be restless the first night in a strange place," remarked Claude.

In a few minutes she descended to the drawing-room.

She and the squire dined by themselves that evening, and the latter was more than usually chatty and gay.

When Claude rose, he said:

"I've half a mind to forego my cigar this evening, and take coffee with you, darling."

"Don't do that," she smiled; "you would be regretting it before the lapse of ten minutes. I'll not ring for coffee until you come—there."

"Ever generous," he rejoined, in the same humor. "Well, I shall not be long."

He held the door open, waiting to gaze fondly after her until she had half traversed the hall, then closed it.

At the sound of its closing, Claude halted, her hand on one of the high-backed, carved-oak chairs that stood by the huge fire-place ascending to the ceiling.

Her expression was full of eagerness, tempered by nervous fear.

"Why not?" she thought. "Why do I dread that every simple act of mine will give rise to suspicion? What I do is natural enough to a woman's curiosity, if not to the interest she feels in this unhappy little waif. If I hesitate, I must do

at another time what I fail to do now. Have I not said I *must* have proofs?"

Hesitating no longer, crossing to an ancient oak-carved, fourteenth-century table, whereon stood waxen candles in silver candle-sticks, she lighted one, and taking it, after a nervous glance at the dining-room door, quickly ascended the broad staircase to the corridor above.

She did not pause but ascended to the next corridor, which was in darkness, save for the illumined radius which her candle made; still she went higher to the third floor.

Stopping, she looked around and listened. All was silent. She had known the corridor, at that hour, would be deserted except by herself. Proceeding to the east wing, she turned the handle of a door and entered.

Below, in a daintily furnished room, amid snowy draperies and softly toned light, slept her boy Stanley. Here the furniture was serviceable but plain, and darkness prevailed; on one side was the bed. Claude approached it, after having closed the door; she placed her candle on the drawers standing near, for she was trembling violently.

Overcoming the nervousness at last, she bent forward and gazed upon the sleeper. Never had light illumined fairer faces—the delicate classical features of Claude, the well-formed, handsome boy countenance wrapped in sleep.

Claude held her breath as she gazed, yet her bosom heaved quickly. Strange, though in sleep, the likeness—that startling likeness—was not apparent. There was certainly a similarity, as was often the case in children, but no more; it must have existed, then, in the expression.

Still that similarity agitated her. The hair was the same golden chestnut, only this boy's was darker. What pretty hair it was! This, too, was a stronger face than Stanley's.

Nevertheless, she had seen brothers who were not so alike.

A coincidence—only a coincidence. Why should she thus alarm herself?

At the moment, possibly disturbed by the light, the boy, turning, threw his little arm above his head. The action brushed his hair back from his temple. Claude uttered a quick, sharp, low cry, and bent lower over him.

On the fair skin, until now hidden by the long hair, was a brown mark, a birth-mark, like a tiny star.

Eagerly, breathlessly she gazed, then rising erect hastily went to the swing toilet-glass, pushed back her hair from the left temple, and looked at the fair skin beneath.

At what? What did she behold? A small brown birth-mark like a star.

"Oh, Heaven!" she moaned, covering her face and dropping on her knees. "Who has done this thing? Who has dared bring this child here, into the very shadow of my home? Oh! malice, cruelty past forgiveness! No, no!" she added, "I guess another reason—perhaps a better—still, oh! it *is* cruel, unjust! If Evan sees that likeness again—if he should suspect—discover—then"—with an abrupt cry—"God help me—then he is lost to me forever—ever! Oh,

Father of heaven! be merciful—let not my sin find me out."

For a space she seemed to cower on the floor in her great misery. In a flash of thought she saw her happy home turned to desolation; the face of the husband she loved, whose smile was to her as her life, turned from her in cold, unloving scorn. It was some moments ere she could conquer the agony and assume an outer calmness, as she remembered that the squire would soon be in the drawing-room and miss her.

Rising, she prepared to leave. Before she did so, she again bent over the sleeping child. This time her lips pressed his cheek. Partly aroused, his little arm went round Claude's soft white throat, his lips returned the kiss. The contact penetrated to the woman's gentle heart. With a sob she clasped the baby form to her, as mentally she exclaimed:

"Poor child, you shall never be abandoned again—never!"

The boy's eyes opened, then closed. The beautiful face bending over him was but a dream forgotten when he awoke to find it morning.

Gently Claude laid him back, took the candle, and withdrew.

"I must still seek proof," she murmured. "I must find out who has done this thing, and why. As to proof, is not

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO VISITORS.

"AN' are ye waitin' for a row, Mees Gweneth?"

The words, accompanied by a heavy, springless tread, broke the spell upon Fairfax Drayton. The wild, fierce passion, which was beating in heart, surging in brain, forcing before it all power of control, as the stormy sea washes down a child's sand castle, was checked and subsided, even as the tempest subsided and laved passively the feet of its Lord before the words, "Peace, be still."

Fairfax Drayton felt as one who had stood on the verge of a precipice, into whose depths he had nearly precipitated himself when a hand had suddenly plucked him back. A few moments, and he knew it would have been too late. He was saved. Better still, the innocent girl by his side was saved. The revulsion of feeling made him for a second blind and dizzy, but fervently, in mental accents, he ejaculated:

"Thank God!"

For a while he dared not trust himself to speak—to look round. It was Gweneth who answered, as swiftly, furtively, she passed her hand across her eyes.

"We have just come ashore from one with your father, Alan; we have been round the Ness. Now he has gone to Scartliff."

Young as she was, her power of self-control surpassed her companion's. But then she had not suffered so severely. She was, however, nervous yet of meeting his gaze, so turned toward the young fisher.

Alan noticed the lack of color, the vague presence of an underlying sadness in the countenance he had been accustomed to look upon from childhood, and sharply he bent his gaze upon the "young leddie's" companion.

Fairfax had stepped nearer the sea's margin; and grasping a handful of pebbly sand, was tossing pebble after pebble at the crests of the tiny incoming waves.

The fisher looked from the one to the other. There is an innate tact of good breeding in the Highlander. Alan felt he was *de trop;* so with a—

"Aweel, Mees Gweneth, if ye'd like ane this afternoon, or in t' morn, I'll no be awa', an' t' boat will be at ye service."

His oars over his shoulder, he proceeded along the shore to where a smaller boat than Donald's was hauled up high and dry. Reaching it, he looked back, a puzzled expression on his bronzed face.

"Wha's made Mees Gweneth sae sair?" he muttered. "Ne'er ha'e I seen her sae afore. Suld *he* ha'e brought t'

saut t' her bonnie e'e he'll find every haund against him at Inesscauld. Oh, ay! let him mek no mistake aboot that."

Watching the two, he saw that they were now quitting the shore side by side, and talking. Eased in mind, he began pushing down his boat, when an advancing step made him turn his head; Fairfax Drayton was coming toward him.

"My certie," ejaculated the fisher, *sotto voce;* "if Mees Gweneth's sair hearted, he's na better. Ay, but there's trouble wi' baith."

"I forgot, Alan, my lad," said Fairfax, forcing his features into their usual expression, "but I shall be leaving here in a day or two, now."

"Leave Inesscauld, is it?"

"Yes; I am well enough to do so, am I not?" smiling. "If you could lend me your boat and your strong arms to take me to Cromarty, it will be better and easier than going over land."

"Sure will it. My boat an' my arms are at your service, sir, on'y gi'e me a fair warnin' so that I sha' na be awa'."

"Certainly; you shall have a day's notice at least," answered Fairfax Drayton, as he left to overtake Gwen.

"Gangin' awa' is he?" reflected Alan; "noo I ken why baith look sair. But he'll be coomin' back; ah, yes! there's na dout o' that; he'll be sure coomin' back."

Fairfax Drayton did not overtake Gwen; either she had increased her pace, or he had been longer than he imagined; she reached the cottage before him and entered.

He was glad. Just then he felt best fitted for his own company alone, certainly not for Gwen's, whose society he knew now in all honor he must avoid. So branching off from the path, climbing the steep side to the heights, he was soon on the cliffs, over ankle deep in the purple heather.

From her window, Gweneth saw him go. She, too, had felt this new pain at her heart could only be soothed and fought with in solitude, so had passed unobserved to her own room. Sitting in her favorite chair by the window, her hands clasped, no longer controlling the misery on her countenance, her eyes fixed, with that blind outward sight, on the sea and steep cliffs, she thought, or rather murmured:

"Going away."

Until that day she had not remembered that this must be; until then she had not realized what Fairfax Drayton's going meant to her. The well of her sorrow was deep; but, as yet, she penetrated the truth only to a slight depth; she only knew that her life had been happier, had expanded into broader lines, had altogether been different since he had been there, that the joyous content of the past could never be restored with him absent.

Pausing, she leaned forward. She caught sight of him as rapidly he climbed the hill. Every tender nerve began to thrill, and convey its sensitive touch to heart and brain. Then, as Fairfax Drayton disappeared, reaching the heights, Gwen drooped her head on her breast and thought:

"What will life now be without him? Why have I been so happy to be now so sad?"

Gwen's existence had been as a fair, smiling landscape that an earthquake had suddenly rent, leaving a huge chasm, which, Curtius-like, Fairfax Drayton could alone close.

And yet, as Gwen sat and thought, sorrowed and pondered, she knew not that the sadness upon her had another, more rapturous name—Love.

Meanwhile, what of Fairfax Drayton himself? He, too, had his fight. For a time he continued to walk swiftly, with that mechanical action of the limbs when a man's mind may be said to be totally apart from the body.

When he stopped, he was far distant from the hamlet of Inesscauld, hidden by the higher ground. He stood, it almost seemed, alone in the world, for at that moment not even a boat broke the softly heaving bosom of the ocean.

Then the man's agony found relief from the confines of his tortured heart, and with a cry he cast himself prone among the purple heather.

His whole soul was full of Gweneth. For the first time did he know what love really was. In the possession of this child, almost, to him, he beheld that happiness which he had renounced all hope of years ago—a happiness which could change the whole tenor of his life.

And this happiness was in his grasp, was even wooing him to take it; but he must not, dared not.

Between him and it arose a grisly specter of the past—a cruel barrier he must not break down.

He writhed there, where he lay in his torture, clutching and tearing at the short grass with convulsed fingers, a sob or cry at times bursting from his lips.

But now pale, haggard from the fearful mental struggle through which he was passing, he suddenly sat up, saying: "Why?"

Why, what right had he to cast this new, sweet-found joy from him? Great Heaven! had he not already undergone enough? Was he to try to prove himself more than human? Think—he was young yet; the future extended further before him than the wretched past upon which he looked behind. Why should he be so hyper-sensitive? Let him reason for as well as against. What might this mean to Gweneth? Why should he break his own heart—and hers?

She loved him. Unconsciously she had revealed it, as the flower exhales its perfume. She had taken his image, setting it reverently upon the pure, holy shrine of her heart.

Was it the words, was it the metaphor he had last used, that brought that sudden change over Fairfax Drayton?

"Oh, God!" he cried, as he raised his clasped hands over his head, "save me from myself—save me from this fearful temptation; or, if you are pitiless to me, save her—save this beautiful child—from—oh, Heaven!—save her from me!"

It was nearly an hour before Fairfax Drayton appeared at the cottage. If there were traces of his *mauvaise heure* on his features, they were so slight that they were not noticeable! One side had conquered. Which?

Gweneth was in the garden, tending her few hardy flowers.

Her fight, too, was over. It had ended, as was natural, in resignation. She had bowed to the inevitable.

Of course, Fairfax must go back again to his friends in the great world. She should get used to it in time.

She had her mother still to love; did she not need it all, as her care? Indeed, she experienced a twinge of conscience at the thought that she had somewhat neglected her of late.

So when the garden-gate swung open, giving entrance to Fairfax Drayton, Gweneth greeted him with one of her usual smiles; only he noted the half-veiled sadness in the depths of those gentle eyes, because, possibly, he knew it to exist there.

Fairfax, as was his custom, began to assist Gweneth with her gardening. It would have been strange had he not; and soon they were chatting on quite the old lines, to outward seeming. Gweneth was the first to refer to his departure; in truth, he would not have done so.

"See," she remarked, "this laurel that I thought was dead, and would have pulled up and thrown away, but which you said should have another chance, is thriving quite strongly. You have brought it back to life. It will be a memento of your visit when you are gone."

"Yes," he smiled. "It will serve in my wandering existence. *I* shall require none to keep it in my mind."

For a while there was silence. When he spoke again it was, wisely, upon a different topic.

Before evening, it was known in the cottage, and generally in the hamlet, that in a day or two now Fairfax Drayton would take his departure from Inesscauld.

"I wunner if he'll no' speak an' ask to be Mees Gwen's Jo before he gaes awa'?" thought Christie, polishing the tinware, the one pride of her existence. "If he gaes an' says naught I'll no' ha'e the best opeenion o' him."

Inesscauld did not regard the matter with any doubt at all.

"Were na' the laddie and lassie made for ane anither? Hadna' the honest fishers e'en? 'Love was the universal lesson, all learnt from a book all could read.' See hoo they were foregatherin' ?"

Mrs. Fane was of a different opinion. Of Fairfax's love she had little doubt. Lying there on her sofa she had watched, and, she felt truly, read the grave, handsome face. But she perceived, as she believed he did, that her darling Gwen was not quite ripe for the asking; that possibly the girl did not yet understand her own mind; and she approved of Fairfax Drayton's self-restraint.

Many a man goes away with a "no" for an answer, instead of a "yes," from overeagerness. His absence would reveal to Gwen the truth. When he returned he would ask and win.

He would come back. Of that Mrs. Fane was assured.

"Has Inesscauld possessed sufficient attractions to ever bring you back among us again?" she asked, smiling, the morning after that double fight, when she and Fairfax were alone together in the little sitting-room.

"Truly, yes," he answered, promptly; "it possesses so

many that the difficulty is not to return, but to go." Then more earnestly: "May I come back, Mrs. Fane? I have not, I trust, outstayed my welcome?"

"You could not do that," she rejoined; "you, who are used to cities and crowds of your fellow-men, cannot estimate the pleasure you have brought into our quiet, isolated lives. We shall miss you much. If you come back, do not fear a welcome from one and all of us."

"Thanks; your kindness makes it all the more difficult to go. I would not, only I *must*."

The emphasis was more apparent to himself than to his companion, who attributed the necessity to very different causes than the true one.

Then came the morrow, the last day, so gloomily, Fairfax Drayton told himself, he was to pass in Inesscauld.

"It is the last day, the last walk," had said Gweneth, as they stood in the garden. "Let us go over the cliffs; it was the first that we went when you were able to go out."

Her companion was by no means averse to the proposition, and felt sufficient command over himself not to refuse.

They had gone; a drowsy quiet reigned in the cottage; there was a Sunday stillness in the air. Even the occasional sounds from the hamlet were hushed, making Christie's pattering in the kitchen seem louder than usual.

More than three quarters of an hour had elapsed when the old woman heard a man's tread in the garden. It entered the passage, and went into the sitting-room.

What was that? A sound as if a glass had fallen. Christie was peeling potatoes, the bowl in her lap, as she sat by the hearth watching the progress of the dinner. But for this, she would have stepped across the kitchen, and, from the door which gave a view of the passage, seen who it was.

Being incommoded by the bowl, she merely listened as she peeled the potatoes. That done, on tiptoe she went to the door, protruded her head into the passage, and listened.

There was a murmur of voices—her mistress's and another, a masculine one.

Christie, on tiptoe, returned to her cooking, a beaming smile on her shrewd features.

"Did na' I guess it?" she thought, nodding her head, with much satisfaction. "He's just got rid o' the lassie, an' come to ask her for his ain braw wife o' the mither. She'll no' say no, I'll warrant. It'll be a bonnie day for them a'."

Twenty minutes—thirty—forty—nearly an hour—when Christie heard the sitting-room door open, and the man's tread in the passage going toward the garden.

"He's gangin' to tell Mees Gwen that he's to be her Jo," thought Christie, grinning. "Ay, the young hearts! Youth's a bonnie time!"

At the moment she turned. A cry of terror burst from her lips. With eyes and mouth distended, as pale as death, she gazed, paralyzed in every limb.

The mistress, who never, in Christie's ken, had moved from her sofa without help, was there—there in the passage

yonder, staggering toward her—her arms extended, her face ashen gray, horror on every feature.

"Christie—Christie—come!"

The faint cry broke the spell upon the old Scotch woman. Springing forward, she clasped Mrs. Fane's fragile form in her arms, ejaculating:

"It is na' your ghaist, then? Oh, a meerical—a meerical. Haud oop, mem; I ha'e ye firm."

For the slight figure was now clinging to the old Highland servant for support, the thin hands clasping her.

"Wha's frightened ye, mem, an' raised ye oop like the mon at the pool o' Bethesda?"

"Christie!" exclaimed Mrs. Fane, speaking low, yet eagerly, between her quick breathing, "look—look yonder!"

She pointed through the open door to the path along which a tall man, a gentleman in bearing and dress, but the latter shabby, was proceeding at a quick pace.

"Do you see that—that man?"

"Ah, mem, he's no sae sma' to be lookit o'er. Who be he?"

"He's come to fetch Miss Gwen, to take her from me!" were the faint, gasping words.

"Tak' Mees Gwen fra ye, mem? Hoot, toot, he's daft!"

"My Gwen—my darling," proceeded Mrs. Fane, excitedly. "Yes, he would have taken her, but I—Heaven forgive me—have sworn to him that she is dead—dead!"

"Hoot, toot!"

"Christie, swear to me this," eagerly, passionately dragging herself higher up in the old woman's arms, "never to let Gwen know of that man's existence. Swear!"

"Dear, mem, I swear it. What for ha'e I to trouble her lugs wi' such ill-far'd news? But wha' for 'ould he tak' yer ain bairn fra ye, mem?"

"Because—oh, Christie! Heaven help me and her—because he is my—bad husband—her father!"

"The gude Lord save us a'!" cried Christie, in amaze.

And just then Gweneth's fresh, sweet voice was heard, as, with Fairfax Drayton, she entered the cottage.

"Ke'p her awa'!" almost shrieked Christie, half passionately, half entreatingly; for, suddenly conscious the slender figure was drooping and growing heavy, heavy in her arms, she had glanced quickly down at the face.

"If ye lo'e the lassie, ke'p her awa', will ye?"

But Gweneth had already run forward. Wonderment at beholding her mother there, standing, though supported by Christie, filled her with an astonishment akin to terror. Her first impulse was naturally to hasten to her aid.

"Mamma!" she cried, and would have flung her arms around her, when her eyes also rested on the pale-gray, still face slightly falling back from the old servant's arm.

Gwen, uttering one piercing shriek, dropped insensible to the ground.

Mrs. Fane was at rest forever. Death had suddenly stretched forth his hand and claimed her for his own.

CHAPTER IX.

A LIE.

BRYAN had speedily grown more than content with his new home. Handsome, affectionate, docile, he became a favorite; chiefly so was he to the little Stanley, whom he seemed to guard, give in to, and protect like an elder brother.

Bryan himself liked all who were kind to him; particularly he liked the squire, with a kind of dog-like fidelity and admiration. But there was only one he unmistakably loved with a child's adoration—Claude Ascelin, the squire's wife.

Whether his eyes were taken by her gentle beauty, or his heart by her gentle nature and kindness to him; whether he was aware of a something in look, speech, and touch, of which others were ignorant, he loved her so devotedly that the boy's face would brighten in her presence, while his ear would detect her approaching footsteps before any other.

And Claude loved him. Could the boy doubt it? No. Though he saw nothing peculiar that, when she came upon him alone, she should call him to her, fondly put her white fingers through his curls, her eyes tender, but grave—once even they were full of tears—then stooping, kiss him with a fervor quite different to how she kissed him when others were present, and bid him be a good boy, and try to grow to be a clever, good man, for her sake.

It was well the little lad was so general a favorite, for none thought it strange that he was placed to sleep in a pretty room not far from the young master's; nor that small items were added to the furniture such as please children.

Perhaps, because it is natural to like those we befriend, Evan Ascelin took much to the boy. He was proud of this genius he was to introduce in time to the world; but also his heart warmed to the lad for his courage and daring.

When the squire rode upon his fine chestnut horse, Stanley would demand to be lifted to the saddle, and crow there with delight, assured his father's strong hands were about him. But he would not bestride even the pony alone.

In the other case, when, half in jest, half to test those fearless eyes with so firm an outlook, the squire tossed Bryan into the saddle, the baby hands quickly grasped the reins, the large eyes dilated, the baby lips compressed, and the baby heels beat against the saddle to urge the horse on.

And on he would have gone, had not the squire's hand seized the bit; while his wife, with startled cry and face pale with terror, come running down the steps, exclaiming:

"Evan, take him off! he will be killed! Evan, how could you?"

She clasped the child to her and kissed his cheek.

The squire had wondered a little at her agitation and alarm, but laughed in his pleasant way, as he remarked:

"Why, Claude, where has your color gone? One would have thought it was Stanley instead of this little hero."

But Claude Ascelin had turned quickly away, and was ascending the steps.

The squire stood awhile, silently looking at his wife, then at the child standing between them. It was well he beheld no likeness between the two lads then. As it was, smiling, he thought, as he led the horse round to the stable:

"What gentle hearts women have toward children!"

But the color did not return to Claude Ascelin's cheek for some little while, and to herself, angrily, she said:

"Am I mad? If I do not have better self-control, what suspicions may arise!"

On rare occasions that resemblance between the two again flashed out. The nurse had called her attention to it; but her mistress had failed to see any. She had a whim to let Bryan's hair grow long, and part it low over the forehead, after which the resemblance was rarely indeed discernible.

But, imperceptible at first, there was a change in Evan Ascelin's young wife.

The squire began to notice a nervous constraint at times in her manner. She would start when he came unexpectedly upon her; the bright, happy smile with which she used to meet him was different, yet he could not have said where the difference lay.

The eyes and the lips were not in harmony, the smile passed through the medium of a nervous fear. How could he tell her that? How could he suspect it?

He only, with concern, observed a difference in the wife he so adored; he recognized symptoms that recalled the time when he first knew her and her health was so delicate.

The idea that the delicacy might be returning filled him with anxiety, and as Claude declared she had never felt better, putting this down to wifely affection to prevent his being anxious, he determined to watch her, so that, did need arise, he might summon medical advice at once.

Bryan had been installed in his new home about three weeks, when the squire, walking one afternoon, passed Mrs. Crannick's cottage, found the old dame seated in the garden outside her door, in the sun. So he stayed to wish her "Good-day," leaning over the gate.

"Good-day, squire. Will yo' not coom in?"

"Thanks, no. On such a day, out-of-doors is best," he answered. "Well, do you miss Bryan?"

"I just do a little. T' place is rare quiet. He was a gude bairn. But it's best he be where he is, squire. Yo' good lady is much interested in 'im."

"We all are," rejoined the squire. "I suppose you have not heard anything from his unnatural parents?"

"Not I, squire. Nor ever shall, as I told your lady when she was here."

"My wife? Has she been here?"

"'Deed she has, squire. It wur about three days after yo' took the lad. Mrs. Ascelin came to inquire all aboot un. She asked no end o' questions, an' wanted me to describe him as brought the bairn. But he wur so muffled oop, I could na see much o' his face while it was gettin' dark. Besides that, I wouldn't ha' remembered after four year ef I had seen him. I wur mortal sorry I couldn't satisfy her, for you' good lady appeared so anxious aboot it. I reckon she had it in her mind to hunt the fellow oop, an' larn all about Bryan. I say let un bide, let un bide. Good riddance o' bad rubbish."

The squire, soon walking on, had a perplexed face. Why had not his wife told him of her visit to old Mrs. Crannick's? Why was she so anxious to have those questions of hers answered? Well, that was natural; but why had she not spoken to him about the matter? Now he thought of it, she had never, when in conversation with him respecting Bryan, betrayed the slightest curiosity respecting the boy's parents, or the fashion of his being confided to the old dame's care.

Suspicion in generous minds finds no congenial soil. It dries up and withers even like the seed that fell on stony land, before the glorious sun of love and faith. What Evan Ascelin had heard only perplexed him. Claude might have mentioned her visit and its result. There had been so many opportunities for her to do so. Such reticence appeared so foreign to her nature.

Should he tell her so? No. Sometimes a too honorable, too sensitive disposition can scarcely be regarded as a blessing. The squire shrunk from the idea of seeming to pry into his wife's concerns. If she wished him to know she would tell him. She might do so yet. He would wait, or—the matter was of such trivial moment—let it go by altogether.

At the instant a dog-cart came spinning along the high-road. In it was seated a gentleman about the squire's own age. On perceiving the master of Ericfield, he reined in the splendid blood-mare beside the sidewalk, exclaiming:

"The very man I was thinking about, Ascelin, and the very man I wanted to see."

"How fortunate," laughed the squire, admiringly patting the mare's glossy neck. "I see she is all right, by your having her out again."

"Right as a trivet," was the response, "thank Heaven! But there's something gone wrong now, I fear, with Fire King. I want you to come over and see him, Ascelin. He's to be entered, you know, for the next Derby, and it's confoundedly queer. I begin to suspect Jaker, the under-help."

"It's rather early for anything of that kind, isn't it?" said the squire.

"Oh, I didn't mean in that way," was the rejoinder. "The fact is, I found the fellow, the other day, ducking one of the stable lads for some petty, boyish misdemeanor; and, on the spur of the moment, I laid my whip across his shoulders. He gave me a look by no means amiable, accompanied by a fair amount of swearing. I gave him notice on the spot,

since when the mare has been queer, and now Fire King, upon whom he knows I'm building for the race."

"I'll come over, certainly."

The squire mounted to his friend's side; the dog-cart spun on down the road. Evan Ascelin had quite forgotten his visit to Mrs. Crannick. Yet it was but the commencement of a chain of events, of which the suspected stable-help was an unconscious, though important, factor.

Fire King visited, and other matters *in re*, the racing stud having been gone into, the squire, refusing horse or conveyance, started for a four-mile walk home.

A mile from Epsom Hall was the busy county town of Camperdown. The squire's way lay direct through it, for the High Street, straight, without a single curve, was a continuance of the main road, to which it led on the other side.

There were many persons on the foot-ways, and the road pretty well thronged with vehicles, many of which were carriages of the gentry, the occupiers having ridden in to shop.

Among these the squire recognized his wife's victoria. It was standing outside the post-office.

He was not aware his wife ever visited Camperdown for shopping. It was fortunate; she could drive him home.

He hastened his steps, for at the instant he perceived Claude issue from the office and enter the victoria. As she did so she spoke some words to the coachman, who at once drove on at a walking pace only, easy for the squire to overtake. He did so at the corner of a street, unperceived by Claude, who sat back reading a letter with absorbed interest. A letter, the contents of which were scarcely of an agreeable nature, for her fair brows were contracted, her delicate lips compressed.

The letter, too, was no perfumed, fashionable epistle, but, in appearance, a half sheet of blue post, doubled.

Just then, before the squire could make his presence known, a country cart came lumbering down the side street, causing the victoria to increase its pace.

For a moment it separated the squire from the carriage; but, overtaking it, he called to the coachman to stop.

The man did not hear the summons, but Claude did.

Evan saw her glance swiftly up, an expression—could it be of alarm?—leap into her eyes as she hurriedly crushed the letter in her hand, thrusting it away in her pocket.

It was but a second, like a flash. The instant after, smiling, she called the coachman to draw rein.

"Why, Evan," she said, a little effusively, as her husband took his place by her side, "who would have thought of meeting you here?"

"Who, Claude, would have expected to meet you here?" he retorted.

"Oh, I have often driven over lately," she replied. "Stimpson's is the best shop in the county, I think."

"You have been there?"

"I have but just come from there."

"You have not made many purchases," remarked the squire.

What made him say so and follow up the subject, he did not know. The words seemed to leave his lips without his will. It was Fate.

A slight pause, a slight color creeping into the handsome face of his companion, then she spoke:

"Oh, they are to be sent home."

"What, nearly four miles? That's not like you, Claude, to be so exacting. Let us go back and fetch them."

Again that look of fear, as she caught his arm.

"No, Evan, no; there is no need. Why should they not be sent? Besides—besides, there are some ribbons they have to match—match in town."

Oh, Claude, sweet, gentle Claude! A true woman, and no actress.

A cold, icy chill, like a touch from Death's finger, passed through the squire. For a second he glanced away, not trusting himself to speak. The fearful, the indescribable misery of that moment!

"A lie," he thought; "she is telling me a lie!"

Why?

For concealment of the truth. What truth? That she had been to the post-office of this distant town for a letter, the letter he had seen her reading—the letter she had hidden away, that he should not know of its existence.

All the way home Claude chatted with effusive gayety.

The squire found it more difficult to play his part. His heart felt cold—cold. His brain numb. What was he to do? Nothing then. He must think. To think of Claude, his wife, uttering so barefaced a lie to him!

For the first time the husband and wife's *tête-à-tête* was a torture; for the first time each rejoiced when home was reached, and they could separate.

On the terrace, awaiting them, having seen them coming, were Stanley and the little Bryan, hand in hand. As they came leaping down, Claude kissed them both.

The squire remembered it later.

"Papa!" cried Stanley, "let North drive us round to the stables?" a treat often enjoyed before.

Assent given, the boys started off. Claude had hastened in. The squire, like a man in a dream, stood gazing blankly before him; he felt like one enveloped in a mystery, with his hand on the book wherein he was to read the solution.

He was aroused only by the merry shout of the boys returning. At the same time Stanley's nurse came along the terrace.

As the children climbed rather laboriously up the broad steps, the squire perceived in the hand of the elder an open sheet of crumpled blue post paper. He started as he beheld it, then quickly moved forward.

"Where did you get that, Bryan?" he asked. "Give it me."

"In the carriage," answered the boy, obeying. "Stanley saw it first, all crumpled up, and he tore it up."

"Ess, papa, I tore it."

"Why did you keep it?"

There was a strange sharpness in the squire's tones.

The tears leaped into the lad's handsome eyes; he drooped his head.

"Don't be frightened, Bryan," said the nurse; "the squire is not angry—not if you speak the truth."

Evan Ascelin winced.

"I wanted it to draw upon," answered the boy.

"That's it, sir. He collects every bit of paper he can."

"Very well; I'm not angry, boy. Yes, always speak out the truth. Now, go—go!"

They went, the nurse remarking later she'd never seen the squire look so strange, and left Evan Ascelin alone, with the letter in his hand, which he knew had caused his wife to tell him that lie. The solution was here!

CHAPTER X.

"SAVE US FROM TEMPTATION."

INESSCAULD was in mourning. Not metaphorically, but in heart and all sad reality. One sorrowing wail had arisen on the news of Mrs. Fane's sudden death; then had followed a silence, a stillness which the solemn presence of "his most mortal majesty" alone produces.

The fishers went with their quiet tread, their tones sunk to a half whisper; even the children were subdued in their play as they raised their eyes in awe toward the cottage where lay the "puir leddie they'd niver see again sitting at her window, greeting them wi' a smile fra her bonnie een."

Gweneth's grief had been wild, frantic, inconsolable.

It was so difficult to realize the cruel truth—that she was alone; that the only relation—as she imagined—in the world, had been so abruptly summoned from her.

Christie, with solemn duties to perform, to assist her in which she summoned a gossip from the hamlet, was in despair.

Even Fairfax Drayton became as nothing, and could not soothe so fierce a tempest of sorrow.

Indeed, he was scarcely at the moment fitted to. Fearful to say or do too much, he dared say and do very little. In fact, he appeared like a man distraught, as one going through a terrible mental struggle. He was colorless, his eyes were hollow, he became haggard. Not a moment could he rest, day nor—it seemed to Christie—night.

During the former he would wander about the cottage, or in its vicinity, ready to give directions, for he had bidden her—Christie—come to him in any difficulty, not to worry Gweneth—and the old Scotch woman thankfully complied.

But not long after the small household had retired for the night, Christie would hear the front door open and close softly, and, a brief space later, see Fairfax striding swiftly to the shore, or to the heights, never returning until the dawn.

"He ha'e a gude heart, he ha'e," she pondered. "He greets wi' the puir bairn he loves, and is sair distressed, I reckon, about his position. Hoo can he, noo, she's sae sair, ask to be her Jo? An' yet isn't it the vera time she maist needs ane?"

Christie's idea was feasible.

Fairfax would sit in Gweneth's presence trying to reason, to soothe her, until, apparently without why or wherefore, he would start up, and, it almost seemed, flee from her.

Had Inesscauld been a place of sufficient civilization as to

possess a Mrs. Grundy, of course Fairfax would have had to quit the cottage, taking his abode up elsewhere. But nobody thought of it in that primitive hamlet—as little as that such a sudden death ought to have been followed by a coroner's inquest or some inquiry.

Had not one and all decided before this sad event happened, that "they twa were sune to be made ane? Then whyfor suld he leave the lassie in her bitter hour?"

If Fairfax thought that both of these things should be, he kept silent. Indeed, his brain was just then in such a chaos that he was not quite accountable for his actions.

He knew he ought to go the instant the poor lady had been consigned to her last resting-place; and yet he felt how difficult it would be to do it. Trembling at the prospect, and wondering whether, when the trial came, he could find the courage, the amount of self-control, to depart.

More than once he half determined, during those wanderings of the night, to hasten on and not return to Inesscauld. It would be kindest. They would not understand; they would misread him. But better that than to remain.

Then he remembered Gweneth's love. Could he add to this present crushing sorrow yet another?

"It would kill her—it would kill her!" he cried, aloud. "I cannot do it—I cannot."

And the mighty rocks echoed back his words.

But after the third day he began to find foundation upon which to reason in regard to his departure. Gweneth's grief, he decided, her first, hence, all absorbing, had killed her love for him. Her affection, naturally, was given entirely to the dead mother, even the sight of whom she was so soon to lose.

Had she loved him, would she not have sought his society in her trouble? But she kept chiefly to her own room, after the time when he had carried her from the darkened chamber, where she had so piteously entreated to be let remain.

"Leave me with her—leave me with her while she is mine," wept Gweneth. "Oh, cruel—cruel!"

Afterward, when together, she sat sad and silent with grief, refusing to be comforted. A pale, piteous little figure of sorrow, that pierced the beholder to the heart.

At such periods it was that the strong, almost unconquerable feeling seized him to defy the world—the future—to take her in his arms, press passionate kisses on that pale brow, and tell her that the love she had lost was poor in comparison to the one she had found. That he loved, worshiped her; that Heaven placed an empty shrine in every mortal's heart, and she, his darling, his queen, had long filled his.

The fight was a fierce one; and to conquer it Fairfax fled.

"I love her, Heaven knows how dearly. But my love would be a curse, not a blessing. Let me rejoice that what I fancied affection in her was not, or is dead, and let me depart. She, apparently, is indifferent to my presence. If I go she will not miss me; let me, then, go."

In truth, a great apathy had come over Gweneth; she no longer wept, but would sit drooping, silent, as overwhelmed by languor. She eat nothing, took thought, seemingly, of nothing. It was almost the fatal prostration of severe grief.

Fairfax was alarmed. Christie was anxious.

"The lassie maun na' dee!" she exclaimed. "She maun be roused. Will ye no' see to't, Meester Drayton?"

Yes, Fairfax told himself on the night of that third day, as he wandered across the heights, that he would see to it. Better the wildest grief than this dangerous, dull apathy.

He would go; yes, he would return to the cottage and write a letter. He would say he had had to leave on an important matter, but would return—yes, it would be kindest to say that—return for the funeral. If, indeed, she cared for him, this would rouse her, and, while breaking his departure, give her something to think upon beside her loss.

The resolve brought with it comparative peace. A good man never rejoices more than when he conquers temptation. Only he knew what depended upon his carrying out this resolve; and for Gweneth's sake—her dear sake—he determined it should be, that he would not fail.

Softly entering the cottage, he ascended the stairs.

Christie was in her heavy sleep before dawn. In the silent chamber one slept the calm, peaceful, eternal sleep. He had no fear of disturbing these. But Gweneth, he knew, would slumber fitfully and lightly. She might then be slumbering, and he would not wake her to cruel remembrance and pain.

The moon, nearing the full, sent a ghostly gleam through the small, deep-set staircase window.

Suddenly, ere Fairfax reached the landing, he halted, surprised. The door of the death-chamber stood open. He knew it was closed when, previously, he had passed it going out.

Instantly he guessed the truth. While he had had his silent watches on the seashore, Gweneth had had hers by the side of the loved being who had left her solitary and alone.

What should he do? His whole soul went out to the unhappy girl. He craved to comfort, soothe; but *he* was not the one, neither was it the fitting hour to do so.

Then he went noiselessly on.

Only a few steps, to pause again. What was that lying on the threshold of the chamber—a white, still form? Had the dead come to life?

It was Gweneth—his love. There she lay, looking so young in her white dressing-gown, her hair streaming over it, the candle fallen from her hand, fortunately extinguished.

Fairfax had leaped to her side in alarm; but a sensation of reverence came over him, as, kneeling, he raised her on his arm. Was she not a being sacred in his eyes?

But as the cold moonlight rested upon the pallid features, the closed eyes, the half-parted, delicate lips, all feeling save terror was swept away.

Was she living? Death never had a fairer, truer semblance. Had grief snapped the frail cord of life?

Had it flitted away beyond recall? How heavily the slim figure lay upon his arm! Oh, could nothing bring warmth and motion back to it? Not even love?

Love driveth out fear. It does more. It drives out reason—honor. It makes its victims its slaves. Fairfax forgot everything but Gweneth—his immense love swelled every vein, held captive brain and heart.

Passionately he clasped her to his breast, as he cried:

"My love—oh, my darling, speak! look upon me that my heart shall not break, that I may know you live."

Silence—silence. No motion in those delicate limbs, no breath from those parted lips.

Then alarm in Fairfax grew to madness. He held her closer, as though to impart his own fevered pulse to hers—he rained kisses on the cold brow, the ivory lids that shut the eyes, he held, in this world, had no equal, from his gaze; he pressed the small lips as though he would draw out death, and by his fond breath re-create life, while at intervals he spoke wild words of passion.

"Gweneth, my love—my dearest! Live—live for me! Summon back your fair, flitting spirit! I love you——!"

And abruptly he found the girl's eyes fixed on him, then the soft, round arms clasped around his neck, the golden head drooped on his shoulder, as Gweneth, with a burst of weeping, cried:

"You love me—you love me. Then you will not go away, too? That would kill me. I love you—oh, yes. I love you better than—than even dear mamma; but if you go, let me die with her—let me be happy. Do not call me back to life. Tell me," her tear-washed face raised imploringly, illumined by the holy light of love, to his, "you will not leave me now; oh, you will not! If you go, I shall die!"

Then Fairfax Drayton knew that, blending in her great grief, had been the greater sorrow of his contemplated departure.

Hot and cold he went, his heart swelled, stopping the throat's utterance, as he gazed down on her.

His mind was dominated but by the one thought—Gweneth! Yet he did not speak.

Then she drew closer to him, her voice sinking lower, and murmured:

"You love me. You called me your Gwen—your darling; yet you do not answer. Will you go, and let me die?"

Then, with a half-stifled cry, he exclaimed, clasping her close, kissing again cheek and brow:

"No, no. I will never leave you. Darling, angel! I love you with all my soul. If man can make your life happy by the sacrifice of his own, I will so make yours. Oh, Gweneth! give me your lips again—I love you! I love you!"

And with a soft, sweet smile, a smile seen on angels' faces, Gweneth joyously, trustfully, raised her lips to his.

Thus, at the threshold of the death-chamber, were they betrothed, and—Gweneth's fate sealed.

Oh, Christie! Christie! wondrous sibyl, most prophetic were

your cards. This was the fortune to come to Gwen from over the water; this was the fortune to cause the "bonnie e'en to sairly greet, as never had they greeted yet."

When the dawn came peeping up over the hills of heather and looked into Gweneth's room, she was sleeping a child-like sleep, a flush on her cheeks, a smile on her lips.

It also looked into Fairfax Drayton's, discovering a man tossing on his bed, crushed down by a burden of misery and self-reproach, yet all the while fiercely angry at the consciousness of the joy beating in his heart.

At moments when he almost summoned strength, courage sufficient to start up and fly, that joy, like a mocking, siren devil, whispered:

"She is yours; she loves you—she is yours. It's too late to repent. If you go, you kill her. Will you have her death upon your hands? If you leave, surely will she die."

Then the haggard man writhed and tossed and moaned, and called upon Heaven to pardon, or vowed what he did was right. Gwen herself would say so, and come to him did he tell her; but for that there was no need.

Leave her—passionately pressing the spray of white heather to his lips—no, never now. It was too late—too late!

CHAPTER XI.

WEDDED.

It was to a strange feeling that Gweneth awoke the next morning—one of a blended great sorrow and great joy. Grief for the dead was no less; but also there was gladness in her, a gladness which she knew would have made her mother glad. She was not alone; she was loved; the future outlook was no longer drear and desolate. There was one to whom she could cling, who, with his great affection, would guard, protect her.

She felt a little shy at the first meeting with her lover; shy, yet craving to be with him. Nevertheless, she tried to seem as usual when she descended to Christie in the kitchen. But it was no use; the rivulet might as well try not to sparkle when the sun shines on it.

"Ye've slepit weel the night, Mees Gwen," Christie remarked; "there's mair o' the rose in ye cheek than I've kenned for some days. I'm glad it is sae. It's na weel for the young to mourn too lang; it does but gi'e sairness to them that's gang—if they ken it," she added, as a rider.

But a little space later, during which time she had been furtively eying the girl, she ejaculated:

"Lassie, there's mair than a gude sleep, I'm thinking, to have made this change in ye—wha' may it be now?"

A wave of rich color suffused the girl's countenance, her lashes, quivering, drooped, her lip trembled with a spasm half of smiles, half of tears. Had not her young heart been bubbling over to tell her joy, yet been too nervous?

In our happiest, as our saddest, moments, we crave for one kind bosom wherein we may find sympathy. Where else could Gweneth seek it now than in this loyal heart, who to her had been nurse, servant, friend?

"Yes, Christie," she cried, putting her arms about the "auld Hieland body," partly, indeed, to hide her face, "you are right; there is something else. Christie, dear, do you recollect the fortune you told me—the fortune that was to come over the sea? Well, it has come." Just a pause, a lowering of head and voice, then the half-whispered conclusion: "He loves me, Christie; he wants me to be his wife. Think of that, Christie!"

"Think o' it!" cried the old woman. "Hoot, toot, lassie, but do ye fancy nane o' us ha'e e'en? Do ye fancy we ha'e na seen for lang that ye are just a' an' a' to him? That he lo'es the vera gr'und ye tread?"

"Oh, Christie, dear, do you mean that?" breathlessly.

"Sure, do I. Gae awa' wi' your news, Mees Gwen. It's nane to me, nor will it be to the ham'et. Did we na ken, an' did na ye sweet mither ken, he wanted to be your Jo?"

"Christie, is this true?" cried Gweneth, eagerly. "Did my mother know it—wish it?"

"'Deed did she"; and the old woman went into explanations.

Gweneth listened with a new delight. Not only did her love please herself, but it had been foreseen and rejoiced over by her mother.

"Christie," she said, kissing the withered cheek, "you have made me very—very happy."

Then she started a little away; flushing again, ashamed for even Christie to see the love-light, which she could not control, in her eyes, as she heard Fairfax descending the stairs.

Christie was the kindest of confidantes. She turned her head away, saying in the most matter-of-fact tones:

"There's Meester Drayton, an' the breakfast is no' ready. Men are awfu' vexed if they be kepit lang for their meals. Please gae to him, lassie; then, maybe, he'll forget awhile the breakfast and the haddies."

Gweneth shyly paused. But was not her heart urging her to go, without Christie's words? Just a second, and she was going down the passage to the sitting-room.

Christie looked after her, tears in her eyes.

"Ay, but how my heart rejoices!" she murmured. "The bonnie, pretty bairn! Ye're a lucky mon, Meester Drayton, to ha'e won her. My certie, but how her mither would ha'e laughed to ha'e seen this! But how can I tell that she doos na'—the puir leddie—an' that even heaven's made the pleasanter to her for't?"

Meanwhile, Gweneth had entered the parlor. Fairfax Drayton stood looking out of the window gloomily. Yes, from the night that had gone, he was a dual being. One of himself cowered before, but would not, could not yield to that other, whose name was Conscience.

At the sound of the opening door he turned. Gweneth, with shy glance and blushes, stood before him. A moment he did not move nor speak. The victory was not quite won, even yet. But Gweneth, extending her hands, said simply:

"Is it true? Was it only a dream?"

"A dream—yes, darling," he answered, suddenly clasping the small fingers, and drawing her toward him. "A dream of happiness, of joy, from which, I pray Heaven, my Gwen, we neither may ever awake."

He pressed the lips that were not refused, and, as the girl felt the contact, she smiled, reflecting, with an exquisite thrill, that her mother had foreseen this happiness with gladness.

Sorrow and mourning were yet at Inesscauld, but there were changes. The trouble which had been in the honest fishers' minds, as to what would become of Gweneth, was removed. There was nothing strange to them that Fairfax and Gweneth should think of love in the house of mourning.

They thought, under the circumstances, that it was not only the most natural, but the right thing for them to do.

"Never had the lassie needed any ane to look after her, as at this time, an' who better able than the man whose life she had saved, and who loved her?"

As Gweneth had accepted him, they did. They referred to him in all things, while Christie took him into her confidence; also subjecting him to much questioning, for indeed did she not now stand in the place of "Mees Gwen's mither"?

"Were they to live still for a while at Inesscauld? Would he take the lassie to his ain hame, wherever that might be?"

The questions perplexed Fairfax far more than Christie imagined. In truth, she regarded them, as they were, simple enough. Why should they not stay among the fishers? Might it not be as well? If not, where should he take her? Not to his own home. He had none suitable for a bride; he who for so long had been a wanderer.

No; he would not stay at Inesscauld. There were reasons why he would not; reasons that made him prefer breaking off all connection with these fisher-folk, even with Gweneth's past. They would commence a new life together in some distant, but glorious, land of beauty; a land of orange groves and sunshine; a land adapted to love, where they might float along the stream of Time, heedless of everything but their own great, all-sufficing affection, he told Gweneth, describing the land to her. Her fair countenance glowed as she listened.

"It must be beautiful," she said. "Of course I will go. Anywhere with you should I be happy. With you in such a land, it will be a paradise. Yet life is long—ours may be," she added, "and sometimes—sometimes, dear, you will let me visit Inesscauld to—to visit mamma?"

Her voice broke; her eyes suffused with tears. Tenderly he comforted her, promising whatever she wished should be.

Upon one matter Fairfax had had to question Christie but without any mercenary motive. How had Mrs. Fane lived? From whence had she derived her income?

Christie answered readily.

"Four times a year a letter came from London, with a paper in it, which Donald took with him when he went south, and brought back siller and gold. How much? Why, it might ha'e been nigh twenty poond. It were a great sight o' money, Donald said, but was na a', for he left some at the post-office for her meestress."

Who sent the money?"

"Ah! that she did na ken."

Questioning Gweneth, he found her but little better informed, save that money came in notes, to the value each time of twenty-five pounds, five of which Donald banked at the post-office, bringing twenty back.

He suggested she should look through Mrs. Fane's desk, and she begged him to aid her.

He could not refuse, for Christie also urged it; neither did he wish it, for he hoped he might discover who Gwen was;

whether in the whole world she had not one relation, one friend to take an interest in her.

If such existed, there was no clew to them in the desk—only a few memoranda and papers of no consequence; a post-office savings-bank book, by which he saw money had been transferred from the bank to the three per cents, and that rather over two hundred pounds would be coming to Gweneth on her proving her right to it; also the address of Messrs. Thorp & Donaldson, Founder's Court, Lothbury.

Consulting Gweneth about these matters, he found her to be, as was not unnatural, perfectly ignorant.

Christie was worse. Both preferred to leave it in his hands.

"Things," he remarked, "can easily be arranged if there is a will."

But will there was none—at least, not at Inesscauld. Fairfax felt rather in a difficulty. The result was, he decided that, after the funeral, he and Gweneth, with Christie, who would not leave her young mistress, should start south.

At last that day of bitter sorrow, when the final earthly tie between us and the beloved dead is broken, arrived. The solemn ceremony was rendered yet more solemn from its simplicity, genuineness, and surroundings.

The day remained, as it had dawned, full of gloom; gray mists shut in the horizon, and crept over the treeless, heathery hills; and as the mortal remains of the poor lady were carried from the cottage on stalwart fishers' shoulders, followed by Gweneth, leaning on Fairfax Drayton, Christie coming after, there was a moaning of the sea upon the shore, while the wind sobbed and sighed across the land, as if all nature were mourning.

As the funeral *cortège* passed through the hamlet, the fishers and their wives fell silently into rank, every head uncovered, and many an eye wet. It was an impressive sight.

Gweneth's sorrow was full of agony. Never had death seemed so terrible to her than now. Her little hand clung convulsively to Fairfax's arm; he felt the thrill of her sobs. Oh, it was too, too trying almost to both, such a scene!

In the graveyard in the hollow of the hills, Mrs. Fane was laid to rest. The solemn ritual was spoken, but at the words "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," Gweneth, with a cry of agony, fell fainting on the sod.

Tenderly, with deep emotion, Fairfax Drayton lifted and bore her from the place. Old Donald accompanied him to the graveyard boundary.

"A puir strikit flower," he murmured, dashing the tears from his eyes. "Friendless, mitherless, and alone, wud the lassie be but for you, sir; surely the gude God sent ye to these shores for her sake, that ye might be guard an' protector to the puir lassie in her trouble. Treat her kindly, sir, treat her kindly, for she is a pretty, delicate lassie, wi' no heart to say ye nay in aught. As ye treat her may Heaven treat ye!"

All that day Fairfax had been very pale; now he looked

paler still, as he bent his face over Gweneth's inanimate form, and, with the cry of a tortured soul, exclaimed:

"Oh, my love, my darling! Too late! too late! God have mercy, and save us both!"

It had been decided they should leave Inesscauld the next day. Donald was to look after the cottage and its contents until arrangements could be made respecting them.

After the midday meal, Fairfax accompanied Gweneth to take farewell of her favorite places along the shore.

Then, tired, fatigued, and sorrowing, he said she should pass the evening on the couch, while he read to her.

Christie, removing the tea-things, left them thus. Fairfax seated by the couch, their hands clasped. Then, putting a plaid over her head, she started for the village to take solemn leave of her gossips before she started on that long, long journey to the great town, where there was "mair wickedness than gudeness by a great deal."

Entering Donald's cottage, she found the family in grave discourse.

Donald sat at one side the ingle neuk, Alan stood at the other, the fire-light, into which he was looking down, making rich coloring in his honest, sunburned face.

"An' wha' mebbe the matter that ye a' luke sae solemn?" asked Christie. "I trust I'm not come to find sorrow here as I ha'e left it? My certie, but ha'e na we had eno' for ane while?"

"Ay, woman; but it's just o' your ainsel', or, rather, o' the lassie we ha'e been talkin'," answered Donald.

"An' wha' aboot her, gude mon? The waur has turned oot the best. I'm thinkin' she's better off wi' her lover than wi' her mither, the puir leddie."

"That's as it mebbe. When we remember it's naythin' that ye ken o' this handsome callant, but what his ain wud tells ye. Is na the lassie sweet an' gude eno' to win a braw London gentleman's likin', ay? No doubt he loves her weel, but ye are baith twa innocent bodies, who are trustin' yessels into the hands o' him whom ye jest know naythin' aboot."

"An' is it now ye're a-sayin' that, Donald?" cried Christie, wrathfully. Have ye na a' been for Mr. Drayton until noo? An' when a's arranged to be aff the morn, are ye goin' to make the hearts o' us full o' trouble an' suspicion?"

"When ane thinks, it's but freendly, woman, to speak," persisted Donald. "It's Alan's thought, an' the lad's right. We a' lo'e the lassie, an' wud keep her fra harm."

"An' pray, what harm's threatenin' her?" cried Christie.

"Nane, we pray, Christie, woman. But nane o' us can read the future, nor the heart o' man; an' you, like us, I'm thinkin', wud save the lassie from e'en the chance o' it."

"I'll no' deny it," said Christie, in dudgeon. "But what ye a' mean is mair than I can tell."

"Then it's just this, Christie," put in Alan. "Would it na better for Mees Gwen to leave Inesscauld safely, Fairfax Drayton's own true wife, than for her to gae wi' him, trustin' in his word?"

Christie was silent; but from her expression it was evident she had caught the speaker's meaning.

"Now, why for did na he just wed her when the meenister came o'er from Cromarty to-day, to bury her mither? It's a sair weddin' that treads so close on the heels o' a burial, but it wud ha'e been safer for the lassie."

Christie was rubbing her chin with her stumpy finger.

"Ye are right, Alan, lad—ye're right," she said. "Gude Lord! why did na ye think o't before it wur too late? Mr. Drayton wud ha'e had na objection, I'll gae bail."

"Then, Christie, woman," ejaculated Donald, "let him e'en wed the lassie noo, while she's among her friends, instead o' takin' her awa', unbuckled, among strangers."

"Why, Donald, how can he, mon? Wheer's the meenister?"

"Do na ye ken that theer's na need o' a meenister in Scotland to mek a lad and lassie man an' wife, as sure as the kirk can mek 'em?" was the response. "Why for should he na mek Mees Gwen his ain this night, or in the morn?"

"Why for, no?" cried Christie, rising hurriedly from her chair—"why for, no? He'll no object. It's niver entered his mind. He'll do it. I'll gae this instant, an' tell him what ye a' say."

Alan's suspicions had aroused in Christie—not suspicion, but anxiety. She trusted Fairfax's loyalty as her own.

Nevertheless, the fishers were right. Why should he not go through the simple form which renders a marriage legal in Scotland, before leaving Inesscauld?

Reaching the cottage, she peeped in through the window. Gweneth yet reclined on the sofa, her head resting against Fairfax's arm, her eyes fixed on his face as he read.

"Donald's right," pondered Christie, as she entered the passage, "Donald's right."

It seemed not at all singular that Christie should summon Fairfax out to speak to him. They two had made all the arrangements for the journey. Leading the way into the garden, Christie told him what she had to say.

A moment her listener's lips tightened, as do those of one whose heart is visited by a sharp spasm. A moment he was silent. Christie, waiting for his answer, fancied she detected an expression which made her for a moment uneasy, and glad that Alan had spoken. Then Fairfax answered:

"Donald is right," he said in a low tone. "I rejoice my darling has friends so thoughtful. Yes, I know your Scotch law. It shall be done this evening. Fetch your witnesses—the whole hamlet, if you will—while I prepare her."

Returning, kneeling, he put his arms about Gweneth, but for a moment could not speak.

"Dearest," she exclaimed, "you are agitated; you tremble."

"It is with happiness, darling. Listen what your good friends wish, and I wish for you." And he told her.

Blush succeeded blush on Gweneth's face, which she hid on his shoulder.

"It is but a form, darling," he whispered. "I will not

further trespass upon the respect due to the dead, save to make you mine in name. Man and wife we will only be until when—when we are amid different scenes and people. My Gwen, will you, to-night, become my wife, linking your life henceforth with mine?"

Gwen, her cheek against his, whispered:

"Your wife. Is not your wish, your will, my own?"

An hour later—old Donald reading the service out of Mrs. Fane's own prayer-book, while Christie and Alan stood witnesses—Gweneth and Fairfax were married. It was a solemn ceremony—almost, from the expression of some of the faces, as solemn as the one that morning. Gweneth's hand did not tremble as, with loving trust, she placed it in her bridegroom's, but his did.

The ceremony over, the two were left alone.

"Gwen—my darling—my wife!" murmured Fairfax.

"My husband," she responded shyly, as she nestled to his arms.

That night, when Inesscauld was wrapped in rest and silence, a man knelt in the graveyard by the newly-made grave, his face in his hands, sobbing like a child. Prayers of anguish came, all torn and broken, from his lips.

Again he cried aloud to Heaven; but for response, as if echoed by a hundred voices, seemed to come the words:

"Too late! too late!"

The next day, man and wife, the two stood on the shore in the early morning, ready for departure. Christie and Alan were bringing down the luggage to the boat, waiting in Donald's charge.

Along the path from the village were trooping the fishers, men, women, and children, to take farewell of the bonnie young bride, whom they had known and loved from babyhood.

Yes, indeed she had grown up into womanhood and beauty among them. It was as parting with one of their own kin.

There had been no wedding garments in this marriage, no feasting, no presents; but now each man, woman, and child bore in some part of their dress a sprig of white heather, and in their hands a larger one.

It was a pretty scene in the clear morning sunshine; the rugged fishers, and this their grand and rugged home.

The tears were in Gweneth's eyes, and soon they fell.

Fairfax, also, was moved; but, man-like, evidently wished the parting over.

It took long; yet every one had a kind word to say, a wish to express. There was sadness at parting, but none would have bidden her stay; nay, they bid her go with her young husband, she his child-wife.

It was the right thing. Was not happiness going with her?

If any one doubted, it was Alan.

As Fairfax extended to him his hand, looking with his clear, honest, fearless Highland eyes into the Southerner's, he said, so that Fairfax alone heard:

"Fare ye weel, sir, an' as ye treat Mees Gwen, may Heaven treat ye!"

Again! Just a shadow passed across Fairfax's eyes, the lids quivered; then he responded, solemnly:

"Amen!"

A second after, he had joined Gweneth in the boat. And now, while Donald and Alan held it steady, each presented to the girl-bride their white heather, until the boat was a fairy boat, snowy white with the bloom. Then Donald, climbing in, Alan pushed them off, and they were away.

As they rounded the headland, and Inesscauld disappeared; as the crowd upon the shore vanished; as the last bonnet or tartan was waved, the echo of the final cheer died among the rocks, Gweneth slipped her hand into her companion's, and looked into his face. She spoke no word—none was needed. He understood; she was his now—his alone, for weal or woe.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LETTER.

For some moments the squire stood, his lips compressed, his eyes fixed straight before him, the letter in his hand.

Never once had he looked at it since he had taken it from Bryan. What thoughts were flying through his dazed brain, and finding roost there, he could not have told. He was unconscious of being conscious.

Had Claude missed the letter then, and come to seek it, she could have drawn it from his grasp without resistance—that is, if she had dared. But seated in the privacy of her own room, she had her own thoughts occupying her, thoughts that lined and shadowed the lovely face, such as no common, every-day care would have lined and shadowed it.

His wife, whose purity and truth he had held equal to God's angels—so spotless that the tiniest smirch would have been crueler than death—his wife, whom he believed as open as the day, who had no secret, no thought unshared by him, her husband, had deceived him—deliberately lied.

Why?

How could he tell? How could he know?

Easily—the solution was in his hand. He was as sure of it as that he stood there with this great trouble—this misery beating in every vein.

He had but to cast his eyes upon that paper, and the mystery would be solved. He should know—what?

His wife's secret—why Claude had lied.

Suddenly he turned, crushed the letter in his hand, crossed the terrace, and entered his study. Closing the glass door, he loosened the curtains, so that no one from outside could see within, then, seating himself, bowed his head on his hands.

To some men this blow might have had far less weight—to the squire death alone could have been more terrible, even if that were so. It is ever a shock to those who foster an object of purity and beauty in their bosom, to behold one day that the purity and beauty are but a lovely glaze, that a snake lies coiled beneath.

Should he read the letter? Surely he had the right. Should he take it to Claude, and bid her read it to him?

He shrunk from the latter as hyper-sensitive natures would. How could he look into his wife's eyes, mistrust in his own? What would be her suffering? Never could she regard him again as she did now, if this—that he believed a lie—were none.

Did he not *know* it was?

Abruptly there came a change. The squire seemed to awaken out of a dream—to be conscious that he was in his own study. Oh, yes; he had come back to his senses as one out of delirium.

Good heavens! what a mountain had he been creating out of a molehill. He reddened as he thought into what depths, perilous to his happiness, his reading of a matter so trivial—so he termed it, in this new humor—might have led him.

He would return the letter to Claude, telling her how it had come into his possession, advising her, with a smile, to be more careful of her correspondence in future.

"Then, if she likes, she can tell me," he reflected. "If not, why should I think harm of her? No—I will trust her."

With full purpose it should be; the squire sat erect, took the letter, drawing it from its creases. Evidently the boys had struggled for it; it was much torn. The squire saw—and that he could not help—that the handwriting was ill-formed, and evidently of some illiterate person.

He broke into a laugh, seeing all plainly now. This was some new charity of Claude's. Did he not know she was of those who, if possible, would hide from the left hand the actions of the right?

Then the smile and the thoughts froze on lip, and in brain, for, as he rose, these words on different lines met his gaze:

The boy Bryan . . . . . .
. . . . . your
. . . . . child.

With a cry the squire dropped the letter, then with strained eyes, and the pallor of death, leaned over it. He *must* read it now—nay, before he had time to reason, he was already doing so—those fearful words burning into his brain.

Only after a brief space did he see that the words, separated as they were, were, or might be, wholly innocent of the meaning he had given them. Yet that one swift glance had caused to arise an awful suspicion which was destined to grow, to accumulate, to the ruin of his life's happiness.

Honor! The squire had forgotten it, as, quivering in every limb, he bent over the paper. For a while his vision was too blurred to decipher the ill-written, ill-spelled words. Only a while, soon they were clear enough.

The letter was torn. The rent was jagged and transverse, from left to right. Thus the address of the sender was gone. The part sentences that could be read were these:

My Deary—I've . . . . to find out . . . . can git no noos of h . . . . It's sirtin the boy Brian . . . . it's hard upon you, it is, deary, that your . . . . Of corse you can't help loving the child . . . . the Durnsford birth-mark . . . . beyond doubt. Not tell the squire . . . . would just kill him . . . . the secret, deary . . . . your fault he'll never suspect . . . . could he. I'll try again to . . . . father. Thank you for . . . . money . . . . your secret safe with . . . . trust
old affec . . . .

Mar . . . .

The squire's heart seemed to stop.

For how short or how long a time he knew not; brain, heart, pulse were in abeyance, though he was not unconscious, as the term is usually understood. All the organs of his body were as petrified—but the waking soul still present.

Could he doubt longer the suspicion to which the sight of those five words, "the boy Bryan—your—child," had given rise, with no volition of his own? The letter, disconnected as it was, confirmed it.

When the blood began again to beat in his veins, it did so slowly, as life returns to a sick man who has been on the verge of the grave. His lips apparently formed, though, in fact, they uttered no sound, "Her son."

Uncalled by will of his, arose the remembrance of Claude's illness, her delicacy when first he had met her, of her shrinking from him; oh, yes, many trivial occurrences which were now explained, which were no longer trivial, but horrible witnesses, adding their evidence to this terrible truth.

He remembered her semblance of not knowing the boy; of her readiness in falling in with his plan, and her sudden indisposition when he directed her attention to the likeness between the two children. Did he need more evidence confirmatory of this damnable letter?

No; yet, if he did, was it not forthcoming? Oh, yes, evidence crowded upon him. Her manner to the child, her caresses, her alarm, her almost sharp reproof of him, her husband, when he had tossed the boy astride the horse. Could mother have expressed more emotion?

All these, and much besides, came upon the squire with overwhelming force, the remembrance of her secret visit to old Dame Crannick serving as a climax.

His arms on the table, his fingers clutched, his body half prone on his arms, he writhed in anguish; groans shook his broad chest, and burst again and again from his lips.

How he had loved her! worshiped her! Worse still to bear how he had believed in her! and now—now, he knew the truth—that ere he met her she had forfeited the right of an honorable man's love, that she disgraced the name she bore, the until then unsullied name of which he had been so justly proud—she had disgraced him, disgraced their boy, who must veil his eyes with thought of shame before his mother.

That was the most terrible of all. The squire sprung up as if a bullet had penetrated his brain, uttered a cry, dropped on to the floor in a fit.

He might have died there, none knowing it. The household went on in its even course, footsteps passed the door, their owners never dreaming of disturbing the squire's privacy. Down in the nursery garden, as it was termed, Bryan was drawing, Stanley romping with his pets, his laughter often reaching the terrace; but his father heard no sound.

In her room Claude had risen, lighted a taper, and drawing a blue, coarse envelope from her pocket, had ignited and

watched it consume, believing the ill-fated letter was inside; in her mental confusion forgetting that it was not.

Slowly consciousness returned to the squire, but accompanied by an exhaustion, a prostration which enforced calmness, or a sluggish action of brain.

What was he to do? Go to her? Denounce her? Accuse her of her infamy? Oh, God! no. Strong man as he was, he cowered from the thought, while the tears flowed down his hidden face. He loved her—yes, loved her yet too well to witness her humiliation, her agony at her detected shame.

No, no. He could not look upon her. Would to Heaven they might, they need never meet again. At that thought the squire's haggard eyes turned to a cabinet, in the drawer of which was a weapon, which used, would prevent their doing so, and bring oblivious rest to his tortured brain.

It was but for a second. He thrust the idea quickly away, as he groaned in spirit:

"My boy—my boy!"

Taking the miserable fragment of a letter, he read it again, often substituting any hiatus. One sentence arrested his attention particularly, "the Durnsford birth-mark." Like a flash he recollected that when they were first wedded—in the first rapturous days of possession, seated with Claude reclining against his shoulder, in jest he had arranged her hair in some new, eccentric fashion, and so discovered on one of the temples a brown star-shaped mole.

Claude had told him it was the Durnsford birth-mark—for long years many of their race had possessed it. He had called it a beauty-mark, and kissed it twenty times.

Did this child, this Bryan, possess it? Was it that to which the letter of the writer referred?

As the thought occurred, there was the patter of small feet on the terrace, and the boy ran slowly past the window. Springing up, the squire called him.

There was a half fear in Bryan's face as he came, for there was a sharp ring in the squire's tones foreign to them. Perceiving the effect, Evan Ascelin smiled, saying gently:

"Come, child, I took away the paper you wanted to draw upon; I must make up for it. Come."

Bryan smiled, too; the squire was his pride as well as love. He came at once and clasped his benefactor's hand confidently in his. The squire shivered, grew paler, but would not cast off the child's tender grasp.

Approaching the table, he gave the boy several sheets of paper, making the little lad's cheeks glow and eyes sparkle; then, as he bid him go, almost as a caress, he pressed back the hair from the child's handsome face. A second he paused; then, as his trembling hands dropped down, he repeated:

"Go;" adding low, to himself: "My God, it is there!"

Five, ten, fifteen minutes' silence; then the squire, hastening round to the stables, ordered his horse to be saddled, and, mounting, rode off at an almost break-neck pace.

"What's the matter with him?" said the groom to a help. "Is he ill, or has he seen a ghost?"

Claude, from her window, saw him in the road, as she was arranging the dress she was to wear that afternoon at a garden-party, and wondered where he could be going.

The squire scarcely knew himself, only that his mode of action had been settled, and until its performance he could not breathe the same atmosphere, nor exist under the same roof, as his guilty wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

RECOGNIZED.

THE mists that hung over the land and ocean during the previous day had disappeared on this morning which found Gweneth a wife. At every movement of Time's heart-beat the sun grew warmer, brighter, the sky of a softer blue, the sea of a tenderer green, as the old brown boat heavily cleaved its way through it.

In the stern sat Fairfax Drayton and Gweneth; midway, grasping sundry packages, was Christie, the end of her plaid fluttering in the breeze, picturesque, if nothing else; while old Donald, with firmly planted foot and strong, sinewy, mahogany-colored hands, plied the oars.

Fairfax, letting his imagination run free, compared him to Charon, and the vast ocean to that yet vaster river, Styx, over which, mythologically speaking, all souls one day must go, unless there be reincarnation, and the spirit return with the character it has made for itself in its last place.

Fairfax thought but of Charon and Styx, and, for a moment, almost wished that they were departed souls, leaving the fever of life, its cares and its sinning, behind them. Then he gazed down at Gwen, and, though pain rent his heart, there was exquisite joy, too. Man would not be man unless there were some veins of self in his composition; otherwise, he would be perfect, or nearly perfectibility, at least.

Mutely he vowed to make his girl-bride's life one of pleasure, delight; that never should she repent having given herself to him.

As to Gweneth, she was in a dream, wherein she was conscious of a great, strange joy. All night she had not slept, but lay awake, bathed, as it were, in this exquisite happiness, this new life which held her still and mute. Ah! it is the soul's very elysium, when silence is found sweeter than speech.

Gweneth asked for no greater than this. Greater she deemed not possible. Was she not Fairfax's, was not he hers? Was she not always to be by him, his companion, to look into his face when she would; to tend him, if need arose, in sickness, with no Christie to come between?

In her blue cloak, the hood drawn lightly over her head, framing her fair young face, she sat almost silent, gazing at the sunlit waters, the range of hoary cliffs, now and again asking whether it could all be true.

Could she be leaving the only home she had ever known, the people she loved, with so little sorrow?

For response, she lifted her eyes to her companion, encountered the love-light in his, saw the passionate quiver of his lip, heard the faintly whispered words, "My darling!" as, beneath her cloak, his hand sought and found hers, and knew it was no dream, no vision, but truth.

In due course the shores of Cromarty came into view. Cromarty, or, as it's termed in Gaelic, Crom-Ba, meaning Crooked Bay; a small enough county, being but twelve miles long, and four broad; nevertheless, fertile and well cultivated, though in the reign of the fifth James it was but a forest abounding in wolves.

Donald brought the old boat up Loch Broom, when the luggage, not of large dimensions, being landed, Christie placed herself as guard over them, for "Didna she ken weel the vice o' the toons? Wouldna they steal ye vera head fra' ye shoulders, if ye didna keep a gude look after it?"

Final farewells were exchanged, and the old boatman, after again drinking their healths, and receiving a handsome *douceur* from Fairfax, went his way to some gossips he knew. Fairfax proceeded to the hotel, taking a private room for Gweneth, while he saw about the best means for their pursuing their journey, being anxious to get to Glasgow.

He found they could be again on their way south within two hours.

"And soon," laughed Gwen, "we shall be in England, your land—mamma's land—*my* land."

"Yes, or in some great center of civilization," he responded. "Are you not nervous at facing the whirl, the bustle, the restless ebb and flow of the great world, Mignon?"

"Alone, I would be; but with you," simply raising her clear, soulful eyes, "I fear nothing."

He stooped to press her lips, but, instead, kissed her brow.

"Tell me," pursued Gwen, "why do you call me Mignon?"

"I do not know; the name came unbidden from my tongue, darling, I think, because there is something caressing in it. If you do not like it—"

"But I do," she interrupted, hastily. "Ah! yes, I like it better than my own name, because there is a sound of tenderness in it—as if it breathes of your love."

She drew closer and whispered:

"It seems so strange, and yet so delightful. It is true, is it not? I am your wife?"

"Mignon!" he replied in a low tone, "do you doubt?"

"Doubt you—my husband? No."

Then he told her of his plan. That they should go to a beautiful land of sunshine, warmth, flowers, fruit, and music, where they should live, their existence a dream indeed, free of care and pain. She listened with interest and brightening eyes. He had told her of this before, but now he described it, and the people—people not of their race.

"It is like a dream—a beautiful dream," she cried, clapping her hands gayly; "when may we go?"

"Soon—soon," he replied. "Are we not on our way thither now?"

Just then there was a commotion in the little passage, the door was brusquely opened, and a woman, fashionably attired, entered the apartment. Fairfax sprung with some confusion to his feet, while Gwen drew back, not, however, before the dark, bright eyes of the intruder had taken in the situation. A knowing sparkle shone in her glance, a demure smile pursed her lips, as, dropping a courtesy she said:

"I beg your pardon. I thought it was my mistress's room."

Instantly withdrawing, she shut the door.

"Her mistress?" remarked Gweneth. "There are other people here, then?"

"Yes, even here," laughed Fairfax; "you are beginning to see the world. That fashionably attired young woman, I suppose, is lady's-maid to a lady who, they tell me, was put on shore last night from a yacht which had come to grief in a squall. She had experienced too great a fright to consent to go further south, to where they'll have to put in for repairs. I trust," he added, "that we shall have no more intrusions, which might have been as much from intention as mistake. Put on your hat, darling; while dinner is preparing, we will go out and see the place."

Meanwhile, the woman who had withdrawn proceeded direct to another apartment, where sat a lady, an expression of intense *ennui* on her handsome face, gaping over a novel she was endeavoring to find interesting.

Her age would have been difficult to have accurately decided, art nowadays is brought to such perfection, but to outward seeming she appeared scarcely older than five-and-thirty; her figure was graceful, her features unmistakably handsome, with—when not bored to death, as at present—a pleasing gayety of expression. Her hair, dressed in the latest style, was bronze-gold. She was in yachting costume, the broad collar secured by an anchor brooch of diamonds, while handsome rings sparkled upon her white hands.

A provincial would have taken her for *une grande dame;* a Londoner, accustomed to frequent its places of amusement, or to inspect the photographs in West End shop windows, would have recognized Miss Kathrine Daly, one of the cleverest, most successful, and Bohemian actresses of the day.

Society did not receive her; she did not say it was "society's loss," for she gave society no thought. In her own opinion society must be the very quintessence of boredom.

"Say that we actresses wear masks," she laughed; "we do, professionally; society wears them in truth, to hide the vice beneath; and what thin affairs they are! It's very much like the ostrich that, stupid bird, hides its head in the sand out of view, forgetful its big body and long legs are still *en évidence.* We actresses are at least honest, so far."

Why should she long for society, having a crowd of friends far more to her taste? She had no fear of her receptions or her suppers being sparsely attended. If there were more gentlemen than ladies—well, so much the better. They were always brilliant, witty; if it recognized an ease and freedom

that was not exactly such as rules the *habitués* of West End drawing-rooms, at least no one was ever bored.

Only upon one point Kathrine Daly was firm: she would have no cards, further than a whist-table. Had baccarat been attempted, the attempter would have had her doors closed upon him or her, and no one who had the *entrée* of her drawing-room would have risked that.

If Kathrine was a modern Aspasia, she had beneath her corsage, as is not unfrequently the case, a heart that was capable of feeling. She was lively, enjoyed existence, and was good-natured, because she had no reason, and it called for too much exertion, to be otherwise.

"Morrison," she exclaimed, tossing her book away as the woman entered, "if this state of things is to last much longer, I shall half regret I did not remain in the yacht and risk going to the bottom with the rest. What a place to land any one! If Lord Gengall had had a spite against me, I don't fancy he could have selected a worse."

"It was the first place the yacht could reach, and you were so anxious to be on dry land, you know. There are a couple of 'spoons' beneath this roof, who, I don't doubt, think it a Paradise," smiled the maid.

"What do you mean? I see by your face something has occurred to amuse you; for Heaven's sake, impart it if it will do the same good office for me!"

"It's only this," said the lady's-maid, "that there is a new-married couple just arrived, whose wooing was most romantic. It's like a story."

"Tell me it, Morrison. How did you hear it?"

"When I went down just now to see that the champagne Lord Gengall had sent on shore was safe, though the temptation was not so great as might have been whisky," remarked the maid, sitting down and speaking with the freedom of a confidential servant, "I found in the kitchen an old Scotch woman, with her plaid about her—just for all the world, ma'am, like you see on the stage. The people here were standing round, while she told them something. There was no harm in listening, so I listened."

"Which you would have done had there been harm."

"Trust me," laughed the maid. "What I heard was this: That the evening before her young mistress had been married to some young man whom she saved from a wreck; that the two, quite like a stage piece, had fallen in love with each other, and the girl's mother, her only parent, having died just in time, the young fellow was bringing his bride south, with the old Scotch servant as her attendant."

"Was it really a marriage, Morrison?" queried Kathrine Daly, interested. "Men were deceivers ever."

"A marriage sure enough, though a Scotch one. To hear the old woman, her 'Mees Gwen' must have been a prize all the men would run after. She couldn't find words to extol the beauty and sweetness of the 'dear lassie,' to which the landlady chimed:

"'Eh, woman! but ye are reet. The lassie is bonnie, and sae is her gude man. They mek a fine pair.'

"My curiosity was aroused. I felt I should just like a peep at the two spoons; so I pretended to make a mistake in the rooms, and walked straight into theirs," proceeded the maid, with bursts of laughter, in which the actress joined.

"You saw them?"

"Didn't I? Seated side by side, like two turtle doves cooing to each other."

"And was the girl good-looking?"

"There's no mistake about it. Only a young thing, but pretty as a picture. All pink-and-white and innocence."

"And the husband?"

"He's much older, but one of the handsomest men, ma'am, I've ever seen. There's something about him that fetches you at first sight. Mr. Sydney Rayne can't hold a candle to him. You must see him."

"I will," said the actress, laughing. "I'll see them both. What's the matter, Morrison?" for the maid had sprung to her feet, her head inclined toward the door.

"They are going out," she said. "I hear them in the passage. Come, ma'am, to the window, and you'll see both."

With a gay laugh and look that showed how ready she was for fun, the actress arose, and, approaching the small casement, gazed down into the road.

The couple she waited for had evidently been detained, for they did not at once appear. At last they came, side by side, not arm in arm. They were laughing, evidently, at something that had been done or said.

A few yards from the house, the husband glanced back.

An expression of startled surprise, of intense wonderment, leaped into the actress's countenance. Grasping the curtain, leaning yet more forward, she exclaimed:

"Fairfax Drayton, as I am a living woman!"

"You know him?" queried the maid.

"Know him? I should think I did; and he knows me. Do you mean, Morrison, that he is truly married to that girl?" she added, eagerly.

"Married last night, ma'am, so the woman declared."

Kathrine Daly, throwing herself in her chair, laughed for some seconds; then leaned her head on her hands, saying:

"Fairfax Drayton married! Let me think."

"Well, now, that you should know——"

"Silence!" broke in the actress, with a sharpness that surprised the maid. "Leave me—I want to think. Go!"

CHAPTER XIV.

IS IT TRUE?

CASTING a puzzled, curious glance at her mistress, Morrison withdrew.

"What's up now?" she soliloquized, going down the passage. "She knows him. I wonder whether she's glad or sorry to see him? How strangely she laughed."

Fully a quarter of an hour the actress remained motionless in the same position as the maid had left her.

What thoughts, what recollections were crowding through her brain, she alone knew; but in one, in all, Fairfax Drayton had a part.

At the lapse of that time she raised her face, and leaned back in the chair.

"So," she murmured; "when I and Fairfax Drayton last met—last parted—I knew my time would come. It has. Was it Fate that landed me here to scatter the rosy clouds of his fool's paradise? He has married that pretty little thing—married her, not in the broad, open light of day, but at night, in some isolated spot in this drear land, out of the ken of civilization, by a Scotch marriage. Only to think of it!"

Again she was silent, absorbed. Then she rang a hang-bell. Her countenance was serious now in the extreme.

"Morrison," she said, on the maid entering, "is the old Scotch woman still downstairs?"

"Yes, ma'am; she goes with her young mistress to London—a pretty, interesting attendant, truly! I'd just like to see her in Regent Street or Piccadilly."

"Go and ask if she can come here for a few minutes. I wish to see her."

"See her, ma'am? Here?"

"Here! Quick—obey me!" exclaimed the actress.

During the maid's absence, Kathrine Daly rose and approached the window, simply for movement, not for observation. Mind and body were restless.

"Shall I?" she pondered. "What need have I to interfere in his amusements? What care I about the girl? She's happy enough in her ignorance. That Fairfax Drayton would ever have done this thing I would never have believed. Still, what business is it of mine?"

At the last mental interrogation, the handsome features were seized, it appeared, by a spasm, the long white hands clenched.

"What business?" she repeated. "This: I once vowed I would not die until I had cried quits with Fairfax Drayton; that I would not hesitate to concoct a way, even if none ex-

isted. Now the means, self-made, his own making, are here to my hand—do I hesitate? No. Through this girl I will wring his heart. I will be recompensed for the past. He scorned me in terms a woman, good or bad, never forgives. What if he were right? It makes no difference. The woman whose love he rejected shall be friend, patroness, hostess of this girl, whose innocence he has deceived."

The heavy tread in the passage announcing the old Scotch woman's approach, the actress quickly returned to her chair, assuming a calm, cold, high-bred, stand-offish demeanor calculated to impress and awe her visitor.

With much wonder had Christie received the summons, yielding to it hesitatingly, and with sundry ejaculations.

"What does the leddie want wi' me?" she asked. "I dunna ken her. Will I gae? Oh, ay; I can na' refuse, if she sae wish it, lassie. But I'm no used to gran' folk. Wha's that? The leddie kens Mr. Drayton? Ay, I will gae wi' ye."

And wrapping her plaid, which she yet retained, about her shoulders, as a chieftain might cast it about him when advancing on the foe, she followed the lady's-maid upstairs.

The impression the actress decided to make she succeeded in doing. Christie gazed open-eyed at the handsome woman before her; never had she beheld the like. Dropping a courtesy, she said:

"I'm told that your leddyship wishes to speak to me?"

"That is so. Morrison, put a chair for the good woman."

"Na, na; I'd lief stan', me leddie; I know me place when I'm in the presence o' me betters. Is there anything I can do for ye, me leddie?"

"Thanks, no; what I have to say to you concerns your—am I right in saying—mistress?"

"If ye mean Mees Gwen—or, I should say, me leddie, Mrs. Drayton"—a sharp twitch moved the actress's lips—"ye are reet eno'."

"Mrs. Drayton," repeating the words; "then my maid has not misinformed me. Your mistress married Mr. Drayton——"

"Jest last night, me leddie. Ye see, Mees Gwen had but noo lost her mither, and had not ane to befriend her, save the puir fisher-folk, but the man whose life she had saved, and who lo'ed her better than the air he breathed. Troth, but it was unco' sune after the buryin', me leddie; still, the occasion was fittin' excuse."

Kathrine Daly seemed to, or really did, pause from some emotion; then she said, in low, but even tones:

"The task I have set myself is a painful one. Why I take it I do not know. There is, I suppose, a something in all of us which makes us ready to unmask villainy. My good woman—for I am sure you are so—I am very sorry for your mistress."

"An' why, me leddie, are ye sorry?" ejaculated Christie, bridling at the tone of the actress. "If it be that the puir lassie has lost the best mither that ever lived, then she deserves it; I'll no' gainsay it. But I see na ither reason."

"You do not see because you do not know—know as little, as you appear to do—of this Fairfax Drayton beyond what, my good woman, his own lips have told you," was the calm, even rejoinder.

"Fairfax! Who told ye, mem, that was his name?"

"Himself, long ago."

"Then, mem, ye ken him?"

"And all about him. I know him, and I know—his wife."

"His wife? Ye ken me meestress?"

Again the actress paused. Words trembled on her lips, then she said:

"My poor woman, for me to conceal the truth would make me as criminal as Fairfax Drayton himself. Your young mistress is *not* his wife—a man cannot wed a second when his first is living!"

Christie looked into the handsome face, speechless. The color had dropped from her honest face, her lips held slightly apart, her eyes widened, her hand relaxed its hold upon her plaid. There was something so pathetic in her look, that, for a moment, touched, the actress averted her gaze.

It seemed to break the spell upon the old servant; swiftly the blood rushed hot and red to her countenance, lightnings quivered in her eyes, as she cried, in raised tones:

"It's a lee! a cruel, base lee! I'll no believe it. Ye're a bad, wicked woman! It's a lee!"

"If it were true, would you have had me not speak, and thus let your mistress live ignorantly in sin?" asked the actress, almost gently.

"Sin!—in sin? My ain pure lassie? Sin and she will ne'er foregather. If it were true—oh, ay, then it would be weel for ye to speak; but it's a lee—a lee!"

Swiftly crossing, all awe vanished before this fearful accusation, Christie caught Kathrine Daly's arm in almost an iron grip, continuing fiercely:

"It is a lee—confess it, mem!—a lee. It is na true!" Then, as she read the handsome face, her spirit broke, and with a kind of wail she cried, prayerfully: "Oh, say it's a lee—ye are sae braw an' bonnie. Ye'll na break my lassie's heart—ye can na tell how she lo'es him. In a' the world she has na ane but him. He is her vera heart's blude. If ye tell her this, ye'll kill her; and oh, ye wouldna do that—ye wouldna harm her that ha' dune ye na wrang. Oh, mem, say those cruel words are a lee—say they are lees, and I'll bless ye, an' kiss the grund ye tread."

And suddenly the old woman dropped on her knees, yet clasping the actress's arm, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

Kathrine Daly was genuinely moved now. The honest, homely affection of the old Scotch woman touched her deeply.

"Tell me," she said, softly, "do you really wish me to say it is a lie? If you wish it, I will."

Christie rose to her feet, drawing herself erect with a natural dignity that was impressively effective in the extreme.

"Me leddie," she said, "I see there is pity in your een,

and I hear a saftness in your voice that's mair hard for me to bear than ye calm lukes. Na, if this awfu' thing ye say be true, I do na bid ye tell me it is a lee. Do ye think I'd ha'e my darlin' live, as ye said, in sin? Dinna ye ken I'd, as would her puir mither who is dad an' gang, suner see her lyin' there at my feet cold an' dead, than pass another minute's sinfu' happiness in the arms o' the scoundrel who has sae wickedly deceived her?"

There was silence, during which Christie looked at the actress eagerly, hungrily, anxiously, evidently wishful that she should yet withdraw the charge she had made. Then, stepping forward, placing her rough, red hand on Kathrine Daly's, she said, solemnly:

"Lassie, there's that on ye face that meks me dread to ask; but answer, for it maun be kenned. As ye hope for the gude Lord's love an' mercy to be wi' ye in ye last hour—is this ye ha'e said o' Fairfax Drayton true?"

"It is true. Ask Fairfax Drayton himself. See if he will deny it. He will not. If he does, confront him with me; then he dare not."

Christie threw her arms upward with a wailing cry of anguish, then again dropping on her knees, covering her face, burst into a frenzy of sobs, broken by sentences, such as:

"Oh, my bairn, my bairn! How shall Christie tell it ye? Oh, why did ye live for this day? Why are na we twa both at peace an' at rest in the grave wi' ye mither? Oh, why did the sea ever cast up upon the shore the villain that has done ye this cruel wrang?"

It was piteous to see how she beat her breast and struck her hands upon the floor in her bitter, uncontrollable grief for the child she loved as her own. At one moment she railed against the actress for telling; then she blessed her—blessed Providence for sending her to save her darling.

"But it'll kill her—it'll kill her! Oh, the wretched pair o' us," she cried, "wi'out a friend in the world! Oh, my bairn! my bairn!"

"Listen," said Kathrine; "you know now that of Fairfax Drayton which, a space back, I only knew. It is in your power to keep what you have learned a secret."

"I keep it secret—I?" cried Christie, in horror and wrath. "Would I, for the happiness o' the earthly body, slay the puir soul, the gude God's gift?"

"Then you must not think harshly of me for having spoken," remarked Kathrine Daly, gently. "So hear me. I pity your mistress with all my heart. Take this"—hurriedly writing some words on a card—"it is my address. Your mistress shall not be friendless if she cares to make me her friend. In trouble, write to me, and I will aid you. If you are in London, come to me, and my home shall be your mistress's and yours as long as she pleases to accept its shelter."

Christie, taking the card, thrust it in her bosom; then, seizing the donor's hand, pressed it gratefully to her lips.

"I can na thank ye as I should," she said, tears in her

rugged tones; "the blaw ye words ha'e dealt me ha'e crushed baith heart an' brain. Ye're gude an' kind, I ken weel noo, an' ye'll no' take offense at my speech in my anguish. God bless ye! Dinna fear, my bairn shall come to ye an' to na ither, in her need."

Kathrine Daly had genuinely meant what she had said, but she could not help a pleased, triumphant smile flitting for a second across her features, as she thought:

"I wonder what Fairfax Drayton would say to that arrangement?"

At that instant Gweneth's voice was heard. She had returned, and was ascending the stairs.

Christie rose hurriedly; then, pale, terrified, shrunk back, exclaiming:

"It's she—Mees Gwen—my bairn, an' wi' *him!* How shall I bid her leave his side? How shall I tell her?"

"Can I help you?"

"Na, na!" quickly. "The puir lassie maun ha'e her death-blaw fra my ain lips. Nane but me maun witness her sorrow."

They were silent, listening. Gweneth was heard to go into a bed-chamber and close the door.

"She ha'e gang to prepare for her journey," said Christie, in a whisper; "the journey she'll never gae with *him*. I'll gae. She'll read the ill news in my een. God help thee, my bairn! God help thee!"

Slowly she left the room, closing the door behind her.

"'Cruel necessity,' as somebody remarked," said the actress, brushing the transient emotion from her eyes. "Bah! if she loves him, why all this fuss? Let her do as I would. Is she, this little bit of innocent unsophistication, better than I? Have I, who so hoped to make some return to Fairfax Drayton, to grow sentimental when the time arrives? I *will* befriend her. I'll show her life. Her prettiness will win her no end of lovers; and this little affair will speedily be forgotten, save"—again the malicious triumph blazed up in her eyes—"by Fairfax Drayton. I know him well. This will be a canker of remorse, relieved but by death, which he'll pray for, but never hasten by his own act. I wonder how the girl's taking it?"

Truly had she read ill news in the old servant's een, and fearful the trouble was Christie's own, had eagerly, sympathetically interrogated her.

Christie was wanting in that delicate tact which culture brings. She did her part well, but her feelings escaped control, and her interpolating interjections had sent the blood from Gweneth's cheek, had filled her eyes with startled dread, even before the truth was confessed.

When it at last was spoken, the girl drew a deep breath of intense relief. The idea of Fairfax Drayton being capable of so cruel a sin was too enormous for credence, and, as Christie's self, she exclaimed:

"It is not true! What woman is this that dares say it?" Then, all aglow with scorn, trembling with indignation: "and

you—you, Christie, who know him, dare—could think this ill, at a stranger's word!"

"Oh, my bairn—my bairn! had ye but heard——"

"I *will* hear—not from this woman, but from my husband—yes, Christie, my husband's own mouth. He shall see this woman. He shall tell her to her face—as he will tell me—it is a lie!"

"Lassie, lassie, reflect, prepare ye—prepare," cried Christie, imploringly. "A minute——"

But Gweneth, her soul on fire with wrath for Fairfax's sake, had sped past, and, reaching the door, disappeared.

Fairfax was in the small sitting-room, waiting her coming.

"Why, dearest," he exclaimed, as hastily she entered, "what is the matter? What has excited you?"

"Something, Fairfax," she rejoined, a little hysterically, "that I ought to rather laugh than be offended at, as you will laugh when you hear. No"—correcting herself—"you will be angry—very angry. No, indeed; such terrible things"—gravely—"are not to be laughed at simply because they are untrue. You will say it is all false; still, you will be angry. False, because I know you would rather—as I would—die than it be truth."

He had drawn her to him, wondering at her words.

In her fond, blind confidence she went to him, leaning on his bosom, thus face being near face.

"Your talk is a riddle, pet. What is it all about?"

"Why"—her eyes beginning again to dilate, her small lips to quiver—"there is a person here, I will not call her a lady—no, indeed, for she cannot be one—I suppose it is she who was put ashore from the wreck—who says she knows you."

Her arms were about him, her face raised to his. How could she help feel that quick, convulsive start? How could she fail to see that countenance of sudden fear?

"Know me!" he repeated, huskily, unsteadily. Then, "What does she say?"

"That—that"—her voice now was tremulous, and had lost its confidence, her eyes greedily strove to read his—"that, dearest, I can be no wife to you, for a man may not have two; and yours, the wife that is not I—lives."

A stifled ejaculation, a swaying in her arms, then he reeled back from them. Ah, the awful cry, the cry of a tortured soul, as she gazed upon that haggard, self-accusing face!

"Oh, it is true—true!" she exclaimed. "What she says is true!" Then flying to him, dropping on her knees: "It is not true! Tell me it is false!"

No words came for awhile, the pallid face was bowed on the shaking hands, then the words burst forth:

"Oh, my God—sinner that I am!"

She heard, and in an instant had sprung from him.

"It is true?" she cried. "You were already married before you saw me—she lives?"

"Heaven knows. We have for years been separated—legally separated——"

"But she lives," broke in the wretched girl; "she is your wife; I am none."

"Gwen, my darling, hear me. I cannot ask for pardon, and yet did you but know——"

He had, in his earnestness, in his remorse, approached. She recoiled from him, with an expression of horror.

"Keep back! keep back! Do not touch me—oh, in *mercy* do not touch me! Oh, go—go—go! Not your wife? It is not false—not false!" she cried, wildly. "What is this?" her hands to her head. "Is it death? Oh, if it were! if it were! My head! my head! Christie, save me! Come—come, Christie—come! Oh, not his wife!"

Distracted, half maddened, waving him back, she reached the door, flung it wide, and fell insensible into the arms of Kathrine Daly.

Fairfax Drayton recoiled, as if a serpent, with forked, venomous tongue and lifted crest, had confronted him.

"You!" he ejaculated, hoarsely. "It is you!"

"Yes," with a smile of triumph; "it is I."

Just then old Christie came down the stairs.

At the sight of Gwen, motionless in the actress's arms, she gave a frightened cry, and sprung forward.

Kathrine Daly, swiftly making her a sign for silence, drew to the door.

"Hasten," she said; "let us carry her to her own room. We do not want the people about us, asking questions."

"One word!" exclaimed Christie, fiercely, beneath her breath. "Is it true?"

"It is."

"Then endless misery light on him!" said the old woman, lifting her trembling hands upward, as if to pull down the vengeance she sought.

And it seemed as though a curse had fallen, for Fairfax Drayton, staggering to a chair, lay as one dead, his head and arms upon the table. Yet his lips moved.

Faintly, but in agony indescribable, came the words:

"Oh, Gwen—oh, my darling! Great Father of heaven, was I mad? Why did I not die ere this?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SQUIRE.

"If you please, ma'am, young Farmer Scott has brought a message from the squire."

Claude was seated on the terrace at work. At a little distance were the children and their maid. To Claude the sound of children's laughter was sweetest music; thus, when alone, she always had the boys near her.

"A message for me?" she said, lifting her head; then, her wifely fears aroused, exclaimed: "Edson, tell me, no harm has happened to the squire. Why should he send a message, when he should be here himself?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. Farmer Scott doesn't say there's anything wrong, indeed," rejoined the maid.

"Bring him—stay—I will go myself."

Rising, she moved quickly along the terrace to the top of the steps, at the bottom of which stood the young farmer, holding in leash a couple of pointers.

"You have, I hear, a message for me?" said Claude.

"Yes, my lady," raising his hat a moment. "About half an hour ago the squire met me down near the spinny, and hearing I was coming this way with the dogs for Major Elton, gave me a message to deliver to you, ma'am, yourself."

Claude drew a breath of relief. Evan was well; her anxiety was at rest.

"And this message?" she queried.

"That the squire, ma'am, will be detained on unforeseen business, and so can't be back for the garden-party."

"Unforeseen?" repeated Claude. "Unforeseen indeed! Did he not tell you its nature?"

"No, ma'am, that he didn't. That's all he said—be quiet, Flo—save, ma'am, that he expected you would go all the same. Indeed, ma'am, it was part of the message that—deuce take the dog! don't ye know manners, leaping and yelping in that fashion?—he wished you to, ma'am—he'd be sorry if you didn't. He'd not like to disappoint Sir Patrick."

"And that is all?"

"All—every word, ma'am."

"Thanks"; adding, smiling: "Do not let your dogs go without fasting our hospitality, and yourself also."

"Thank you, ma'am. Why, the brutes know every word you say, I do believe, ma'am," laughed their master; for the animals, pulling at their chain, strove to reach Claude, their long, healthy tongues lolling over their gleaming teeth. Descending, she stroked and fondled their glossy heads, then

with a "good-day" to the farmer, ascended the steps, while he proceeded to the back premises.

"Unforeseen business," mused Claude, innocent, how innocent, of the bitter truth of the Damocles' sword so near, so very near falling. "I wonder what it can be? Something very important or Evan would not have disappointed Sir Patrick. I wish I might—I hate going anywhere without Evan; I feel but half myself when he is absent. I wonder if—" She paused, then shaking her head, added: "No, young Scott said Evan wished I should go, that he would be sorry if I did not. Then I will go. Possibly he may join me later."

Moving back along the terrace, she paused to observe the sunlight as it fell on a portion of the grounds, creating effective light and shade.

Her musing was interrupted by the boys who, with a shout, came toward her with some bit of child-news. Stanley first, Bryan a little behind, aware he was not the child of the house—nevertheless, the love that shone in his eyes for his beautiful benefactress was as great, if not greater.

Claude raised the younger in her arms, but her gaze fell fondly, too, upon the little Bryan. Awhile they talked, she listening to their infantine prattle. After, with a kiss to both, she sent them back to the maid, and entering the house, ascended to her dressing-room, for if she went, and it being Evan's wish she should, it was time to prepare.

Are there such things as presentiments of coming joys or sorrows? Did no shadow of the advancing shadow fall across Claude? Was this disinclination for the garden-party, this desire not to go, a part of it, or was it merely because Evan was not to accompany her?

Almost wearily she dressed, and was indifferent to her maid's praises of her costume. When she had first beheld it, she had thought it would please Evan, and even guessed the words he would say ere he sealed his approbation with a kiss.

Now all its brightness would be gone before he beheld it. As Claude snapped a bracelet on her arm, she did not murmur to herself, or hear it murmured to her:

"He will never see it—never!"

She had dressed so languidly that the carriage was announced almost before her toilet was completed. She descended at once to the terrace. The children had gone, though she could hear their voices. Should she call Stanley, as was her custom, to say "good-by"? No, already she was late.

Taking her seat, the footman shut the door, and the carriage rolled along the avenue.

Just then, clear in the still air, her child's voice rang through her:

"Mamma!"

Almost involuntarily, she bid the coachman return.

The boys were in the avenue. They ran to meet her. She leaned from the carriage to say "good-by," but Stanley she took in her arms.

Why did she press him close, so close to her mother's heart, this afternoon? Why kiss the soft baby cheek again and again? Why, with such reluctance, surrender him to his nurse, and draw that long sigh when the carriage drove on? Before another day dawned she knew.

. . . . . .

The moon has risen over the tree-tops, sending deep contrasting shadows on the lawns and flower-beds, their splendor mellowed in that silver light. The servants are all in their quarters. The children are rosy in their first sleep. The lights are subdued and dim in the reception-rooms, ready to be heightened should the squire return. In the stables one of the grooms keeps his ear on the alert for the beat of the horse's hoofs. But all is still and silent; the squire has not come back yet.

They are wrong.

Evan Ascelin has returned already. He is in the house.

Noiselessly he has gone from room to room, in a strange, restless way, like a man with emotion under severe control.

He enters Claude's boudoir. Its pretty daintiness looks rather ghostly in the subdued light. Here, for the first time, the hard features relax.

The squire, sitting down, covering his face, sobs like a child.

'Tis a sight to make angels weep when a man sheds such tears as these, and for such a cause. One feels that it is the shadow of tears of blood shed by a breaking heart.

He looked around upon his shattered home—his ruined happiness. Before morning he intended to be far away.

Sudden sorrow ages far swifter than that which is prolonged. The squire looked ten years older, bowed indeed by years, when he arose.

Just then his gaze lighted upon his wife's desk, the key in the lock. It was her private desk; he had given it to her. Swiftly he made a step toward it, then paused, hesitating.

A little, very little while ago, that desk would have been sacred to the squire. The most intricate lock would not have placed the contents more beyond his reach than did his honor.

But now, were not things different? Was not a husband privileged? How could he tell but that he might make some discovery that would explain all?

How circumstances create sophists! Crossing, the squire sat down before the desk, and opened it. The delicate perfume the contents exhaled, the nicety of arrangement, recalled Claude as though she had risen up before him. Another pause, another struggle; the squire began his search.

What did he find? This only: in a secret drawer, a locket containing a lock of golden hair, the pure hue of Claude's own, and one of darker color, with these words engraved inside: "My own dearest. F. D. to C. D., 18—."

Only that. Was it not enough? It was best he had looked. It made the pain of going less. Placing back the contents as he had found them, he was about to rise when a step approached. The door opened. It was Claude's maid.

"Mr. Ascelin!" she exclaimed, with a start of surprise. "I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't know you'd returned. Shall I order the dinner to be served?"

"No; I have dined," rejoined the squire, hastily quitting the desk with a feeling of guilt. "Has my son gone to bed?"

"Yes, sir; an hour ago."

"Is he asleep?"

"He's just woke up, sir," answered the girl, eying her interrogator curiously, seeing now the change in him.

The squire gave orders that the boy should be dressed and brought to him—dressed in his warmest out-door attire.

The squire was in the small drawing-room where he and Claude sat when they were alone, when the nurse brought the boy. The child ran to its father; the quick-witted maid marked the passionate love with which the squire took him in his arms; also that a letter was so placed in one of the mantel ornaments that it could not fail to attract instant attention.

An hour. There had been no summons from the squire—no sound. Why had he had the boy dressed in out-door attire? Curiosity prevailing, the nurse ventured to knock at the drawing-room door. No answer, no sound. She dared to look in. The room was empty!

Bearing the news to the servants' hall, cautiously they visited all the rooms. No one. It was evident that the squire had gone, taking the little Stanley.

Hark! the sound of wheels in the avenue. It was their mistress returning. She was early, for after the garden-party there was to be a *dinér à la Russe*, then a Cinderella dance. She could not have stopped for the dance.

Dispersing like startled sheep, a footman hastened to open the door, and Claude swept in. She looked rather pale and weary as she stood in the lighted hall. The entertainment had had no pleasure, her husband being absent.

"Where is the squire?" she inquired. "Has he returned?"

He had returned, and gone out again.

"Out again?" repeated Claude, surprised. "Did he leave no word with you?"

No; not any.

Claude paused at the foot of the stairs. Should she proceed at once to her room? No. She entered the drawing-room, closing the door. Why, she knew not, but she was depressed and singularly weary. Curiously, impatiently, the servant waited. Silence again—no sound.

An hour. Something must be wrong. The old housekeeper this time would see.

She entered, to recoil with a cry; for there, in the soft light, in her pretty garden costume, her lovely face white as if chiseled out of marble, lay Claude—still, motionless as one dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BITTER CUP.

THAT man is dual most of us have experienced in ourselves. Who has not had moments when the spirit or shadow of ourselves stands apart from our material living body, criticising, with approval or blame, our deeds? Is it what men call conscience? Then, is the Conscience Spirit the invisible guiding or correcting hand of God?

It is a glorious moment when that other self regards us with its spirit eyes in smiling commendation.

But how terrible is it when its gaze is averted in sternness, horror, and loathing!

Such was it now with Fairfax Drayton. No accuser could have been to him more awful than this, his other self, whom, with his mental or spiritual vision, he beheld by his side, regarding him lying prone with anguish and remorse.

All the extenuating circumstances, and there were many, slid from his recollection. He saw his sin only in the worst colors, and shrunk with horror and loathing from himself.

His former marriage had been but a repetition of thousands of such cases. A mad infatuation for a beautiful woman—a hurried union—a brief wedded life—then the discovery that it was but another marriage failure—a few months of misery, of struggling at the golden fetters, then a legal separation.

That had happened years ago, since when he had been a wanderer over the earth, never having again seen or heard of his wife. Their two paths had laid so diametrically apart, and of their own desire neither would ever seek the other. They were as surely separated as man's law could separate them. But—oh! what a fool is man in his self-styled wisdom—there was not enough for the law to set them free, only enough to wreck their lives.

If this was an extenuating circumstance, Fairfax Drayton refused longer to recognize, to find comfort in it.

Could he have heaped blame on blame, remorse on remorse, he would have done it; but comfort he refused to find.

In all the world he held himself the most detestable of sentient things. Gweneth had saved his life—how had he shown his gratitude?

Oh, his beloved! his darling! If he could but see her! If he could but lie at her feet and own his sin! But no, never again would she look upon him, while the pale horror he had last seen on her face would haunt him to the grave.

Yet he *must* see her. He who had taken her from her

home must not leave her helpless in the cold, unknown world, her sole companion, Christie, being scarcely less innocent of its ways than herself. He must rouse himself.

Yes, innocent! for, thank God, she was innocent, as pure as she had come from the hands of her Creator. Who better than he to know the pitfalls extended in this world to entrap the young and innocent, to lure them with smiles, to clasp them in their false embrace; then, with a triumph that might make fiends shudder, draw them down to ruin?

The simile brought to his recollection his last view of his pure darling in the arms of Kathrine Daly. In an instant he had risen to his feet. To him the pitfall seemed to have Gwen already in its grasp.

"No, by Heaven!" he thought, "that shall not be. The woman's touch is contamination to one so pure. No greater harm shall come to her than has by my means. I will save her from Kathrine Daly, my enemy."

How? To and fro he paced, tortured, in body and soul.

Finally he resolved he would see the actress; not to appeal to her; that would be useless. After, he would try to see Gwen; but felt that would be useless, too.

Waiting to get the command over himself he knew was necessary, he proceeded to the actress's room and knocked.

In response to his summons, a voice that made his teeth come quickly together called, "Come in!" and he entered.

It had occurred to him Gweneth might be there; to his intense relief, the actress was alone.

She had been lying back in her chair thinking, but, on seeing him, had drawn herself hastily up, and now sat regarding him with an expression which was a blending of triumph, amusement, and mocking scorn.

"What, is it you?" she remarked. "This is an unexpected honor, indeed. Have you come to overwhelm me with abuse for interfering with your amusement?"

"No," he replied, coldly, calmly; "that you are my enemy I know, as that you have done what you have, out of no compassion, as other women might, for the girl, but to hurt me." The actress seemed to wince, but concealed it by a shrug of the shoulders. "In that intent, however, you have failed. Whatever reason actuated you to speak, I thank you —I could almost bless you for having done so—for saving—yes, rescuing this poor girl from me. How it all came about, I even now cannot understand. I cannot understand myself how I could have yielded to temptation. I did so, and I thank you for saving my——"

"Victim," suggested the actress, with a sneer.

Fairfax Drayton inclined his head, adding:

"From the dire results of my madness."

"Ah, I remember; you are rather given to acting upon impulse, and this is not the first time you have had to regret it."

It was he who winced now, while his face darkened.

"You say my wife is living," he proceeded, taking no notice of the taunt.

"Why should she not be?—you are."

"That is no reason. She was always delicate—very delicate."

"Hence you reckon upon death having removed her from your path. I wonder you do not hire a detective to follow her about, so that he can wire you the happy event when it occurs," she laughed.

"I asked you, or meant to, for proof of her being alive—aware you knew her."

"Once," put in the actress, "but we quarreled long ago; nevertheless, though we do not speak, I have seen her. By merest chance I saw her about three months ago. She was as handsome as ever."

"How living?"

Kathrine Daly rose up from her chair.

"Pardon me," she said, haughtily, "I, Mr. Fairfax Drayton, am not going to act detective for you. There are heaps who for pay will do your dirty work. If you came here with that purpose——"

"No; no such purpose brought me," he replied, quickly. "It was one quite different. What I want to say is this: you have rendered this poor girl a great service. I know her true, her gentle, trustful disposition."

"You have tested it," she interpolated, with a laugh.

He reddened, but still refused to respond to her taunts.

"She will be grateful. She will regard you as a friend."

"Have I not proved one?" again she broke in.

"Yes, I own it. But friends seek each other's society. She must not yours."

"Must not?" indignantly, the color rushing from chin to brow, the eyes aflame.

"Must not—shall not," in the still calm, cold tone and manner, which had never varied.

"Do you imagine I would have been so tempted had I not loved this child? Do you imagine I do not still love her? Ay, with the holy reverence with which one loves the spotless angels of heaven. It is my wrong that has brought her acquainted with you, hence it is my duty to see that the acquaintanceship goes no further."

"I rather fancy *that* rests with me."

"No," firmly, intensely. "Try but to see her again, to bring her under your baneful influence, and I will see her. I will not spare you; the truth shall be spoken. I can prove it, even to her! In her God-fearing innocence, she will shrink from you, as from some reptile in her path."

The actress had bitten her lip until a deep red line marked it. Nevertheless, she answered, with a careless laugh:

"Complimentary, gentlemanly, certainly. A return for the service I have rendered in bringing you to your senses. Pah! you are right. I spoke not for this girl, of whom I know, for whom I care, nothing, but to revenge myself on you. You need not fear. Such bits of innocence are not amusing to our sex, how much they may be to yours. In half an hour I trust to have left this dreary hole. It is not likely the girl and I shall ever meet again; at least, I shall make

no effort in that direction. Now," again seating herself, and leaning back as she extended her hand for her book, "have you anything else to say, or may I consider our charming interview at an end?"

"At an end," he repeated; "I regret the necessity that forced it on you. Farewell."

He bowed stiffly, and moved to the door. Rising, the actress swept him a ceremonious, minuet courtesy, a mocking smile on her lips. A moment later she was alone.

Resuming her seat, she covered her face, sinking into reflection. Almost instantly, however, her maid entered.

"The conveyance, ma'am, will be here in a quarter of an hour."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Kathrine Daly, with a yawn; "I am weary of this place."

"And the people," smiled the woman. "I saw that handsome fellow leave; he doesn't appear to have cheered you much, ma'am. Was he very angry? Was there a row?"

"Fairfax Drayton never rows; it would be difficult to make him. He is, you see, a gentleman."

"Now, ma'am, having harmed him, you're willing to flatter him."

"It's no flattery, but truth. Morrison, I'll tell you a secret. Fairfax Drayton is the only man I ever loved."

"Well, I never! And he, ma'am?"

"Be content with what you're told, and seek no further," exclaimed the actress, with a ready assumption of her usual manner. "Quick! see that all is ready, that we may not lose a second in departing when we are able."

Before the quarter of an hour, the vehicle stood waiting.

Morrison was stowing away sundry packages; the actress yet lingered. Why? Just to tap softly at Gweneth's room door, just to exchange a few words with Christie; then to press the honest, rugged palm, ere she hastened on, saying:

"You'll remember?"

"Dinna think, me leddie, I'll forget. The gude Lord bless ye!"

Fairfax, with intense satisfaction, had beheld the signs of Kathrine Daly's immediate departure. He knew it was not likely, nay, possible, for her to have conversed further with Gwen; thus was relieved from the great fear which had taken possession of him—that Gwen, in her loneliness and despair, would cling to this new friend, who, defying him, further to revenge herself upon him, would take the girl with her.

But no; there was the sound of her light tread on the stair.

Standing at the window, he beheld her appear outside and take her place.

Just as the vehicle drove off, looking up, she saw him. With an impudent smile, she kissed the finger-tips of her exquisitely fitting glove in his direction.

Sternly he regarded her; but joy was throbbing through every nerve.

"Thank Heaven," he thought; "she is gone alone. My poor darling is safe. They are not likely to cross each other's paths again."

"He was watching; I knew he would be," laughed Kathrine Daly. "If he could only guess that, after all, I've tricked him. I would wager any amount that the girl will come—that before a month she will be beneath my roof."

Experiencing great relief from the actress's departure, Fairfax Drayton now bent all his thoughts upon Gweneth, and her present terrible position, of which he was the cause.

He could not leave her at this place unprotected. It was imperative he should ascertain her wishes; whatever they were, they should be carried out. But how could he learn them? If he could but see her—if he dared!

Wretched, worn, haggard, he sat reflecting upon what means to pursue, when the door opened, and grim, severe, Christie herself stalked in, erect, rigid as Fate.

"What!" she exclaimed, "are ye still here? Do ye not understan' that ye presence beneath the same roof as that puir bairn is a further insult to her? If there be the wee'st bit o' conscience left in your bad, evil heart, go—leave her alone."

And she extended her brown hand toward the door.

Fairfax rose. A moment he was silent. Then his grief burst forth.

"Oh, Christie!" he cried, "look upon me. I ask—I expect no pity, yet I am not evil, I am not bad. Do I not suffer—oh, God, how much!—for this act of madness? When I think upon my darling, is not my heart wrung——"

"Wrung?" broke in the old Scotch woman, indignantly. "Could ye see the puir lassie lyin' on her bed, as pale an' still as a lily; lyin' as ane dead, as I would ha'e feared twenty times or mair she was, but for the wee bit piteous moan that comes now an' again fra her white lips, an' the piteous wurd that rend ye vera heart-strings to hear—'Mither! mither!'"

"My God!" cried Fairfax, dropping on to the chair, his head bent forward on his hands, his figure convulsed. "Mercy! mercy!"

"Oh, ay, mercy, indeed, for ye who kenned none," proceeded Christie in augmented bitterness and wrath. "I say, there she lies, her pretty arms aboon her head, her bonnie hair a-streamin' loose, her body quiverin' fra the sighs that are breakin' the bairn's heart—yours would just be wrung truly wi' drops o' blude."

"Christie," and he staggered to his feet, "I repeat—look upon me. Is it not my very heart's blood that is being wrung from me? Think how fearful was my temptation? My love—her loneliness. I swear to you that I hold, in the eyes of Heaven, that she would have been my wife——"

"What, an' ye a married mon?"

"From the wife—between whom and me all love is dead—I have been parted for years. For years we have never met. I hold that in the eye of Heaven I am free—that my darling would have been my wife; and in some beautiful land, far away, each rising sun should have brought new happiness to us all. You would have watched her girlish beauty blossom forth into the woman in her happiness—her joy,"

"Though her life was ane o' sin?" exclaimed Christie.

"I deny it! I deny it!" he cried, carried away suddenly by his own words. "It is you who will crush her down under this heavy burden. Woman, woman, let me see her. I will —I must. Stand aside."

"If ye see the lassie, ye'll ha'e first to fight wi' me," said Christie, barring his way. "I'm auld, but the gude God will gi'e me strength. Ye may kill me if ye will, but ye shall na see her if I can prevent it."

As suddenly as the paroxysm had seized him it departed.

"Forgive me, Christie. I am mad with remorse and sorrow—remorse for myself, sorrow for her. Pardon—pardon!"

His limbs seemed to refuse support, he dropped on his knees at the old woman's feet. The action surprised, startled, and moved her.

"Mr. Drayton," she said, "this is na position for you to me!"

"It is my right position," he answered, "before all women, since I have wronged one so pure and innocent. But, thank God, the wrong is slight. She is as pure now as when we first met. What is done cannot be undone, or willingly would I lay down my life for that purpose. Christie, help me to think now what is best to be done for her."

He had taken her hand in his. After a slight effort to pluck it away, the old woman yielded it to him. There was that in the handsome, distressed countenance of the man kneeling before her which touched her despite herself. Yes, Christie had been young herself once, and yet remembered it.

She strove with herself to maintain her anger, but the recollection of him she had liked and respected, how one and all had trusted Fairfax, would force its way into her recollection. He had ever been gentle, generous, and, after all, the harm that had been done was the speaking a few words by old Donald. The greatest injury was Gwen's breaking heart; but that the world would not punish—would take no note of.

"There's truth in what ye say," she answered. "The waur can na be made the better noo. We maun think o' the lassie."

"Will she—will she return to Inesscauld?" he inquired, hesitatingly, as he arose.

"Return to Inesscauld!" cried Christie. "What, to blush wi' shame at the deception played on her? To ha'e to tell her sad story to the honest fisher-folk who ha'e kenned her from a bairn? Na, na; the lassie will niver do that. Ye ha'e destroyed her, an' her hame baith."

He bowed his head, making no denial.

"Where, then, will she go?"

"That I'll no tell ye—for her sake an' yours. Ye might be followin' the lassie. Go, an' let your way be as unknown to her as hers to you."

"Perhaps it is best," he assented, after a pause. "But," hesitatingly, painfully, "Christie, there is one question I must ask. You say I have destroyed her home. Heaven forgive

me, it is true. Hence, I dare not leave her here alone, unprovided without the means of procuring another. Gweneth, you remember, told me all her concerns. She needs money——"

Christie stepped back, her sternness returning.

"Not anither word—not anither!" she exclaimed. "I'd see the lassie dead—as she'd see herself—before she'd take a bawbee fra you! Think o' it, mon. Think o' what ye're offerin', an' be silent."

"But what will she do?".

"Tak' na care. The lassie has a few poonds, an' I ha'e a few mair. Besides, as ye ken, we can get mair; noo, there is na need o' further words. When will ye leave this place?"

He paused; then:

"Christie, your heart is not stone," he said; "may I see her—once?"

"Na—not for a second. My heart is stane to ye there," was the resolute answer.

"So be it. Then I shall depart immediately. Stay!" He wrote on a slip of paper, which he handed to her. "Should you ever wish to communicate with me, a message or letter to that address will reach me."

Christie at first drew back, hesitating to receive it; but changing her mind, took it, thrusting it into her pocket out of sight. Then saying, "Farewell," she quitted the room.

For some moments Fairfax remained, reflecting upon what had passed. He had promised to go. He would keep his word. As he rose up, he heard Christie's voice, then perceived her quitting the house, going toward the shore with the landlord, who was also owner of a small trading vessel.

Like a flash it occurred to him that Gwen must be alone. In his pocket was a note that he had penned to her in his frenzy, which, however, he had not dared to give Christie, aware it would never have reached its destination. Were he to slip it under Gweneth's door, she might see it.

Noiselessly ascending the stairs, he paused outside the room. How he trembled! Taking the note, he stooped down, and in doing so, half fell against the door. The latch was old, or not rightly caught, and the door opened.

A pause; then Fairfax, with hot-beating pulse, looked in.

On the bed lay Gwen, motionless, as Christie had described, her face buried in the pillow, her back toward him, her pretty golden hair falling about her.

Another pause; then he had entered. A moment he stood by the bed, looking down upon her. Under his hand was her hooded cloak, in it was a pocket; into that he slipped the note. Then reverently bowing his head, raised a fold of his darling's dress, and pressed it to his lips.

Fearful of longer self-control, alarmed that the sob in his throat would reach his lips, he stole toward the door.

What was that?

A piteous moan, the words "Mother! mother!"

He fled; fled from the room, the house.

So they parted.

CHAPTER XVII.

KATHRINE DALY AT HOME.

It was an off-night, and North Lodge was a blaze of light at an earlier hour than usual; broughams and hansoms rolled to and fro, turning the quiet road for a time into quite a noisy thoroughfare; and the immediate neighborhood was aware that it was an At-Home at Kathrine Daly's.

It was a brilliant assembly. If the feminine complexions possessed a striking similarity, there were none present to criticise. The dresses were handsome, the diamonds superb, none more so than those that flashed round the white throat of the hostess, on her white arms, rose and fell on her heaving bosom, and sparkled amid her cloud of fluffy hair.

Handsome as she had appeared to the unsophisticated at Cromarty, now she was regally splendid. She sat on a low lounge, the center of a circle of male admirers, receiving compliments, flattery, with the nonchalance of one too familiar with them, and holding them as her due.

Her admirers certainly varied in age, from scarcely over twenty to considerably over sixty. Some kept up the ball of bright conversation with animation; some did little more than gaze and listen, feeling sufficiently rewarded in being admitted into the magic circle at all.

"Besides," remarked the Honorable Verdant Sappington, *sotto voce*, to another, fondly caressing his mustache of down, "who can talk against those fellars? It's their trade to do it, don't yer see. Gad! might as well try to make tables with a carpenter!"

Those to whom the honorable inanity referred were two or there dramatists, and a journalist or two—"fellars on the papers." To one of these the actress often looked up with a friendliness she directed to few of the others.

He was a man of about eight-and-twenty, with intellectual features, and an exceedingly good-humored expression. He talked easily, throwing in a word here and there; paid a compliment in an off-hand fashion, as he leaned on the back of the actress's chair, and proved by his manner that it was friendship alone that made him an *habitué* of her salons.

Just without the circle was a gentleman, who rather listened than talked, but rarely throwing in a remark over the others' shoulders. Nevertheless, by the smile on his dark, somewhat Mephisto, features, and glittering in his eyes, proving he was both amused and enjoying the conversation.

His age would have been rather difficult accurately to determine; apparently he might have been a man of forty, who had gone the pace and seen much of what is so sadly termed —life. He might have been close upon sixty.

At times, the mouth and eyes made lines at their corners, telling their own tale. But in a second they would vanish beneath the half-cynical, half-languid smile.

"Never did you look more beautiful, believe me, and never was success more perfect," remarked one of the circle, referring to the last character the actress had personated.

"Perhaps the one was the result of the other," she laughed. "What do you say, Archie? Being on the papers, of *course* your criticism must be just, unbiased, and honest."

"I'll send you a copy of the *Sphere* to-morrow, and you shall judge for yourself."

"I understand; you fear the anger of my wounded vanity, so would be absent when I read. But I have already seen the *Sphere*, and hope you were honest and unbiased when you wrote it. It beats the *Period* and *Matutinal* out of the field," remarked the actress. "I know who wrote the criticism in the latter, and have a crow to pick with him."

Just then some new arrivals broke up the little ring, and Archie Melton sauntered away.

The journalist was almost a "tame cat" in the actress's establishment. He wandered through the rooms or about the house at his own sweet will.

Kathrine liked him, liked to chat *tête-à-tête* with him; and on both sides the liking was purely platonic. He had never felt the slightest thrill of passion for the actress, who, surfeited with admiration, preferred him for it.

The rooms began to fill and grow warm. Conversation, laughter, and music blended in one whole, and the young journalist decided to slip quietly off to his club.

So, edging to the door, he passed out on to the landing, cool and fresh with ferns and palms.

The buzz of voices was yet in his ears, when, in a broad Scotch accent, he caught these words rising from below:

"An' what is the gowk makin' such grimaces for? Is na he accustomed to hear his ain tongue? I ha'e come to see the leddie Kathrine Daly, so jest gae an' tell her sae."

"What do you want to see her for?"

"That's just my ain beesiness, which I'll tell her."

"Then you must come again. Come in the morning. She's got company, and can't see you."

"How, mon, can ye tell that, wi'oot ye ask her?" answered the voice. "What are the lassies sniggerin' at? Ha'e they never seen an honest woman before?"

"Well, p'raps not many," said the male voice, laughing. "But look here; I tell you you won't see Miss Daly to-night; she's got company, so you'd better go; you're in the way."

"An'," wrathfully, "I tell ye I'll no gae until ye ha'e told the leddie I'm here. Didna' she hersel' gi'e me this bit o' writin'—her address? An' didna' she say I was to come to her in any trouble—ay, come to her first o' any—an' noo, when, the gude Lord pity me! it may be life or death in the balance, ye'll na' gae and acquaint the leddie wi' my presence. Oot o' my way, then—oot, I say—an' I'll e'en gae an' find her mesel'."

There was the sound of a scurrying of feet, a burst of laughter, accompanied by the words, "Stop her!" and "Let her go! What fun!"

The journalist had listened, curious and interested. What importation from North Britain was this? Soon the genuine earnestness of the tones, the words uttered, caused him to descend to the landing and look down into the hall.

The scene that met his view at first almost moved him to laughter. In the vestibule, fairy-like with graceful ferns and palms, interspersed by numerous softly shaded lights, stood Christie, in the same dress she wore at Inesscauld, clean, but considerably worn. Her plaid just dropping off her grizzled head, her arm grasping a gamp-like umbrella, raised high, about her two or three female servants giggling, or in paroxysms of laughter, while the man-servant, with his arms elevated, was "heading her back," as they "head back" cattle.

In a second the journalist had controlled his features; there was an expression in Christie's rugged, homely face that impressed him. Leisurely he descended the stairs.

"Stand aside," he said, curtly; but already the female servants had drawn off, while the man was subdued. "Now—what is it, my good woman? What is your business? And who are you?"

"If you please, sir," with a courtesy, "I'm jest Christie, an' I ha'e na shame in sayin' sae. But as to me beesiness, I maun tell it to the leddie hersel'—though ye ha'e, I confess, a gude face ane feels they might trust; though, unfortunately, the gude face," sighing, "is na always the index o' the gude heart, as I ken, to sair cost."

"I fear, as this fellow has told you, that really Miss Daly cannot see you to-night. Is it very important? Now, to-morrow——"

"Important! Oo, ay, that it is. It's life an' death mebbe. See here, sir; the leddie gave me this bit o' writin', tellin' me to come to her when I had need; an' will ye tell me that so bonnie a lassie as she wud gae fra her word? Not she!"

"Give me the paper," said Archie, after a moment's reflection. "I will take it to her. Only then, if she says she cannot see you, you will be content?"

"'Deed will I; an' the Lord forgive her, an' help me," with a sudden clasp and wring of the hands.

Interested and curious, the journalist returned to the drawing-room, where he found the actress engaged in conversation with one or two of the male guests. For a few moments he hesitated to disturb her, but recalling the anxiety of the old Scotch woman, advancing, he said in his easy, resonant tones:

"Ten thousand apologies for disturbing you, but there's a strange old party, evidently hailing from the Land o' Cakes, downstairs, desiring to see you. Egad! she refuses to leave until she has—unless you dismiss her. She founds her assurance that you will not do so on this talismanic piece of paper."

He handed it to the actress, whose whole countenance lightened with pleasure and triumph as she beheld it.

"She is right," she exclaimed; "she knows that at any time, or any place, I would see her."

Rising, excusing herself to those around, she crossed to the door, veiled by a rich plush portière.

"Shall I accompany you?" queried the journalist.

"No, thanks; I will go alone."

The actress, forgetful of her own splendor—the flashing gems—hastily descended the stairs, when, dropping her umbrella, and elevating her hands before this vision of loveliness, Christie ejaculated:

"The gude Lord guide us! Sure, but it is the leddie—the vera same. Mem," dropping a courtesy, "had I kenned ye had been sae gran'—the queen wi' her croon o' goold could na be grander—I'd ha'e ganged awa' as they bid me, an' not troubled ye."

"I should have been very angry with them, and vexed with you, if you had," smiled the actress, resting her white jeweled hand on the old Scotch woman's rough serge-dress sleeve. "Come; I can guess you are here to tell me of your young mistress. In this room we shall be undisturbed."

She led her into a small anteroom, Christie, reverently, with awe, following.

"Now," said Kathrine Daly, placing her guest in a comfortable chair, "tell me all. I feel you are in distress and trouble, or you would not be here."

"It's true, my leddie, it's true indeed," began Christie; then, like a flood, emotion overwhelmed her, and she cried, "Oh, my baird! my puir lassie! She is deein', my leddie! she is deein'!"

The actress was fairly startled. She exclaimed, anxiously: "No, no; not so bad as that. No, you good old soul, not dying?"

"Oo, ay, me leddie; she looks jest like a ghaist, an' is sae quiet an' still, wi' na speerit, na life in her. Ah, mem, I ken it weel. It came on her after her mither's death; then at that time I'll no' speak aboot, it disappeared. But the grief an' the sorrow ha'e brought it a' back, an' she's fadin' awa', mem, she's fadin' awa' like a puir strickit dove."

Again Christie wrung her hands, pressing them to her eyes, and beating her knees.

"Are you in need of money—immediate need, I mean?" asked the actress, after a pause of reflection.

"Na, na, mem; it's na that; we ha'e siller as yet. It is na that I ha'e come to seek."

"That was not my meaning," exclaimed Kathrine Daly, quickly. "I thought, considering how you quitted Inesscauld, that it was possible, and I could have rectified that trouble at once."

"Ye're vera gude, my leddie, but it's na siller—I would it were only that."

"I can indeed easily guess what is the cause of your mistress's trouble. What can I do to help you? Tell me, and I will do it."

"I kenned that, I kenned it weel, when yonder gowk would

ha'e sent me off wi'oot word wi' ye," said Christie. "Mem, I'll jest tell ye hoo it was. The lassie is jest breakin' her heart for sorrow. Life's gray an' drear to her, an' she'd leiver die. So she jest sits white an' still, waitin' for death. I cannot rouse her; I try, mem, but my heart's breakin', too; I'm a weak, helpless body.

"This evenin' she was na weel, so I made her gae to bed an' rest. What I tell her to do she does with a strange smile. Ah, mem, such gudeness in the young is a bad sign.

"After a while I went in to her. She was sleepin', so I sat doon by her an' watched. But as I watched, the lassie looked sae like death itsel', that I got frightened that she was jest slippin' awa', or would slip awa', e'en like that, if nothin' was done to hauld her back. But what could I do, that I had na a'ready?

"We twa were jest strangers in this big London. Jest then—oh, my leddie, it were the finger o' Providence—I lifted my eyes an' they rested on your address, which I'd stuck into the lookin'-glass. Your words came back as if ye were by speakin' them.

"'She did us ane good,' I thought! 'whyfore should she na do us anither? Who can tell but she may save the lassie? I'll try, I'll try.'

"An' I oop an' wrapped me plaid aboot me, my leddie, an' I am here."

"You did right, quite right," said the actress. "Not only will I help you, but together we will save her. The hour is too late for me to accompany you to-night, but to-morrow morning I'll be with you. Now you must have refreshment before you start."

Christie protested, but the actress was resolute.

"Oo, but that's fine," remarked the old woman, as she emptied a bumper of champagne. "Noo, mem, by your leave, I'll e'en tak' the cake wi' me, an' eat it on the road," putting it beneath her plaid; "then I'll no' keep you, while I'll the sooner get back to the lassie."

With some hesitation Christie clasped the white hand extended to her; then the actress saw her into the hall, waiting until she departed.

"Whenever that person comes again," she said to the servant, "at whatever hour, treat her with respect, and instantly inform me, no matter how, or with whom, I am engaged."

On entering the drawing-room, she met the journalist.

"What, going?" she exclaimed.

"Duty calls, I must obey; I waited to say good-night."

"Good-night. I'll let you into a secret," smiling, her eyes brightly sparkling. "In a few days my drawing-room will possess a new attraction."

"In what form?"

"*That* is another secret. Come and see."

"I will; trust me," he rejoined, as he left the room.

Almost before the hall door closed upon him, he had forgotten the circumstance, unaware that it was to form an important page in his life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEATH IS SWEETER.

THE wand of the magician is not more powerful than a great sorrow. In how brief a space had the latter changed the trustful girl into the woman—a woman with eyes opened to the world's wickedness!

Until that moment she had trusted every one, now she shrank with terror from all. If such as he could be false, who could be true? It was a hard, a distressing time for leal, honest-hearted Christie.

Clinging to her, Gwen implored incessantly to be let leave the inn. It was her one cry.

"Take me away from here, Christie; oh, take me from this place!"

"Ay, my bairn, whativer ye say, Christie will do. Where shall we gae—to Inesscauld?"

Gweneth, uttering a sharp cry, bowed down her face on her hands, shrinking, cowering.

"No, no; not there," she ejaculated. "Never again there. Let us go, Christie, where no one knows us. Oh, yes, let us go at once, for the people here know all."

"Truth, my bairn, how could they help but ha'e a strong surmise?"

"Then, Christie," eagerly, "we will stay here until night, and in the dusk I'll steal out unseen."

"My puir lassie, the sin is na yours. Every honest heart will beat wi' pity for ye an' hate o' him."

But Gweneth persisted. She sat in her room, pale, grief-stricken. When the dusk fell, softly she stole down the stairs, and from the house. In a moment Christie joined her, and the two women started for the town of Cromarty.

That night they slept in a cotter's humble home; the next morning they reached the town. On the way they had talked over and arranged their plans. Christie would go to the post-office and learn what must be done for them to obtain the money of which now, truly, they were in sore need.

And then—whither? That was decided, too—London. Had not her mother lived there until she settled at Inesscauld? And Christie agreed, merely remarking, "it was an awfu' way"; for was not the address given her by the leddie, in the great English metropolis, too?

On reaching Cromarty, Gwen waited on the shore while Christie fulfilled her mission.

It was while seated thus alone that she found the note Fairfax had left. Her first impulse, on discovering who was the

writer, was to cast it from her in horror; her next, to clutch it back from the advancing wave as if it had been sentient. She knew then that, despite all, her love could never die.

He had written to her. Why? What had he said? Dared she read the note? If so, she must hasten; Christie would soon return.

With trembling, eager fingers she opened the page and read, and love came back—minus the trust.

To her, in confidence, Fairfax had told everything—was it not her due? Metaphorically prostrated at her feet, he owned his fault. He blessed Heaven for saving her from him, and implored her in her goodness not to curse him.

"I do not ask forgiveness," he wrote. "How could you forgive, when never shall I forgive myself? My darling, my love—for as a saint must I love you—still, could my life undo the past, how gladly would I lay it down! Truly, henceforth is existence a curse to me."

Every word Gwen read, and read again; then wildly, passionately pressed the letter to her bosom, to her lips.

The tone, certain sentences of what was written, took strong possession of her. He was in sorrow, bowed down with remorse, and she must not go to him; but were she dead, then might her spirit hover about and soothe him without sin.

Why should she not die? Why live in sorrow? Life had sunshine and gladness no longer for her. Did not she feel in herself she *was* dying? She had but patiently to wait.

Then she wondered, if he died, whether they would meet, or whether his sin would be a pit between them.

"No, no!" she cried. "If I forgive, will not Heaven? I am not better than God. 'In this world we will die to meet again in that to come.'"

Christie, on her return, was delighed to find Gwen more cheerful, more composed, unaware of the perilous belief that had taken hold of her.

The old woman was in spirits also, for she brought good news. The money had been invested in Gwen's own name; and the "cheild" had told her she could sell out the sum at any post-office, advising her to leave it there until they reached London.

"Then," said Gwen, eagerly, "we can start at once?"

"Ay, dear lassie, as sune as we find the way."

* * * * * *

On a dull, wretched evening, the two, tired and travel-worn, reached St. Pancras, and stepped forth to confront the great world of London. Two children could not have been more innocent or ignorant of its ways.

In the gloom which enshrouds that terminus after dusk, the old woman and girl stood, holding each other, confused by the roll of the vehicles, the diverging roads, the, to them towering houses, and glaring lights of Pentonville Hill.

"It's an awfu' wicked place. It's Sodom and Gomorrah in ane," remarked Christie. "I kenned sae much. We maun be cautious, my bairn."

They had need of caution, certainly. Two such as they, homeless at night in such a neighborhood. But their guardian angel, or, possibly, Christie's patron saint, Saint Andrew himself, was watching over them.

A policeman had been lounging past, curiously regarding them; at the sound of the old servant's voice he halted. It had warmed his very heart-strings.

"An' what ha'e ye need to be cautious aboot, my woman?" he said. "Ye're just strangers, I'm thinkin', to London."

At the sound of the dialect Christie gave a cry of joy. She instantly recognized, as had he, a compatriot.

"It's the gude Lord as ha' sent ye," she cried. "Noo, to think, in a' these whir and crood o' folk, to meet a Scotsman!"

Speedily she acquainted him with their perplexity, and easily he helped them, taking them as far with him as his beat allowed, then directing them to a quiet, respectable house in a quiet street, where he knew they might find apartments.

Before half an hour all arrangements had been made with "the tidy body," as Christie termed the landlady, though the old Scotch woman had uttered many ejaculations at the silver asked.

Finally, however, weary of heart and foot, they were safely and comfortably lodged, even Gwen that night sleeping as though care and trouble were not.

For some few days after, Christie, occupied and interested in the new life and the new scenes about her, believed that her young companion was as interesting as herself. But one morning, as she watched Gwen, pale of face and listless of movement, push away her untasted breakfast, the truth flashed upon her.

"Lassie," she said, with gentle reproof, "ye maun eat—eat, ye ken, to live."

"Ah, Christie," replied Gwen, with a sad, wan smile, "but if one does not care to live? If it's greater happiness to die?"

Christie uttered a sigh, then caught her in her arms, as if she had really seen Death's hand extended.

"My bairn—my bairn!" she ejaculated, with a sob. "Ye maun na' speak nor think that. Dee—a young lassie like you! Na, na; oh, my dearie, ye'll get o'er this sair heart. There'll be bright days yet. Dinna talk o' dein'. Ye maun live for puir auld Christie's sake. Promise, lassie. What would she do wi'oot ye? She'd jest ha' to dee, too."

The old leal heart rocked the girl on her bosom; then, dropping on her knees, kissed her hands, entreating her to live; until Gwen, much moved, threw her arms about her neck, promised, hysterically, to try, adding:

"But, oh, Christie, it is so hard—so hard!"

For a day or so Gwen made an effort to be cheerful. The endeavor produced a worse relapse, and the terrible fear that she was dying gained strength with Christie.

Many were the secret tears she shed, many the curses she heaped on Fairfax Drayton.

What was she to do? What could she do to rouse, to save her darling? Ah! if they were but at Inesscauld. There, every soul was a friend; here in London, she had none.

Then had come the night when Gwen's sleep had looked so awfully like death, that, remembering Kathrine Daly, casting her plaid over her head, she had gone to seek her.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SWEET SIREN.

CHRISTIE felt very nervous the next morning, when she thought of the step she had taken, as to how Gwen would take it. Would she be angry? Christie felt that anger from those pale lips would be very hard to bear indeed.

"I wish I had gi'en her a hint," she thought, arranging the breakfast. "I must tell her before the leddie comes, or she'd be angry doonreet."

Gwen had risen late. She had got into the habit of doing so. The weary day was all too long. How different to the Gwen of Inesscauld, who was up with the dawn, light of heart and step! Now so delicate, listless, wan, yet so pretty. This morning she looked more listless than usual.

"Are ye na sae weel the day, dearie?" queried Christie, pausing in cutting bread to regard her with wistful anxiety.

"Only weary, Christie, dear," was the response, accompanied by a forced smile. "I have been so, so busy all night, that it is no wonder."

"Busy! You, lassie?"

"In my dreams. If they are dreams. Sometimes they seem too—too real. I was back at Inesscauld," she proceeded, with a far-away look in her eyes, "with mamma and you, Christie, and we were all so—so happy in the dear old home I shall never see again."

The delicate lip quivered; Gwen's voice failed; she burst into tears. In a second Christie had flown to her, her arms about her, as she cried:

"My bairn! my bairn! Dinna ye greet—dinna ye think o' your sorrow, for your auld, foolish Christie's sake. Cheer up, lassie, cheer up!"

"Bear with me, dear," murmured Gwen, resting her head on the kindly bosom; "I'm very trying, I know, but—I will be better—soon. Just at present I can't quite forget——"

"Him," put in Christie fiercely; "the villain who——"

But Gwen's fingers were quickly on her lips.

"Christie!" she said solemnly, "not a word against him—I cannot bear it. I loved him once—I love him still."

She had put her arms around the old Scotch woman's neck, resting her face on her shoulder. The last words came as a whisper. Christie dared not speak, but fondly she caressed the darling head. There was silence, then Gwen said:

"Christie, let us get away from here. Let us go to some place by the sea. I so miss its voice. I lie awake thinking

of it— How it is breaking on the shore, and leaping among the rocks. It and I had been so long friends that we understood each other. Sometimes I fancy that it misses me as I miss it. I know I feel as if it draws me to it, calling—calling in my dreams. Let us go, Christie; and when I die don't weep, dear, but bury me somewhere where I may hear the great heart of the ocean beating, as dear mamma does. This big London is so lonely."

"My bairn!" exclaimed Christie, with a sob, "ef ye were to gae to the sea as ye are noo, its voice would draw the life fra' ye. Na, na, lassie, ye'll think of auld Christie, who has only you to love; ye'll na' gae an' leave the puir auld thing desolate. This big London is na' sae lonely; it's we who are that, not it. My bairn, listen, an' don't be angry wi' me, for what I did was for you. Last night while ye were sleepin', I jest went oot to breathe the air, which is no' like our bonnie Hielan' air, an' who, lassie, did ye think I saw but the handsome leddie who did ye that kind turn at Cromarty."

Gwen started.

"You saw her!" she exclaimed. "Did she speak?"

"Ay did she, soft an' kind, as the bonnie leddie she is. A' she spoke was aboot you, lassie. She said it was na' reet for ye, sae young, to be alone in London—it was na' gude for your spirits, na' your health. An' naethin' would content her but that she should ca' an' see ye this vera morn."

"Call here!" ejaculated Gwen, in alarm. "Oh, Christie! Christie! How could you allow it?"

"Now, my bairn," said the old woman, solemnly, "ye maun listen to me; your gi'in' way like this is as mickle a sin as if ye pet an end to ye life wi' droonin', or in any ither fashion. Yes, lassie, it's a sin against the Lord. Think o' your mither; had na' she her troubles, an' did she na' bear them bravely? We are a thankless race, that's true. Reck'le't the many joys Heaven sent ye, Mees Gwen, an' are ye gangin' to flee into its face for your first trouble? Lassie, ye maun bear your burden, as we a' ha'e to ane time o' our lives. Tak' courage an' bear yours patiently."

Christie's eloquence surprised herself. Never did she remember to have made so long a speech before. But it was wisely done, and not without effect. It broke with a new light through the gloom of the girl's grief, as the first sun ray through the morning mist.

"Christie," she said, meekly, "what ought I to do? Can this sorrow be ever lifted? Don't be hard upon me."

"Hard upon ye, dearie!" cried the old woman, her solemnity vanishing. "Christie could na' be that. I only would ha'e ye rouse yesel'; no' gi'e way like this for ain who is no' deservin'. What ought ye to do? Ah! that's it. How can an auld doitted body like me tell? That's why it's gude to see the leddie, who's kindness itsel'. She'll tell us."

Whereupon Christie, bustling to remove the breakfast, told of her visit to the actress's house.

Gwen grew interested. A too-sympathetic friend is at

times rather an enemy, fostering the disease. Sorrow is selfish. The antidote is to force the mind to dwell on others.

Scarcely was everything in "apple-pie" order, when a loud knock announced their visitor.

There were footsteps on the stairs. Rousing herself, Christie made to cross to the door, when it opened, and Kathrine Daly entered.

If Christie had stared at the vision the previous evening, she did scarcely less so at the graceful lady in Quaker-gray morning toilet, hat and gloves to match, so neat, so simple, with an expression on the handsome features almost as gentle and kindly as Gwen's own, who entered.

The actress advanced with hand extended, her tone, her manner apologetic, as she said:

"Will you excuse this intrusion? But hearing you were in London, which is so vast and dreary a place to strangers, I could not help but come. I should be so glad to help you, if I may. To be your friend—if you will let me."

Gwen, in wondering admiration, regarded the lovely speaker. Her poor lonely heart seemed to leap in her bosom, and to go forth to this radiant being. Readily she placed her hands in those stretched to receive them, saying:

"You are very good. Already I owe you so much."

"Hush!" her finger to her lip. "From this moment let the past be as dead. We will never speak about it."

"Never," said Gwen, gratefully. "You will never tell any one the——"

Her head drooped, her color rose.

"I'll never tell any one," smiled Kathrine Daly. "I know what you mean. We will have our secret—you and I—from all the world, eh? I'll say you are a young friend staying with me. Who has a right to know otherwise?"

"Staying with you?" repeated Gwen, startled.

"Of course," exclaimed the actress, gayly. "Do you think, now we have agreed to be friends, that I am going to leave you to pine, and mope, and be miserable here? No, indeed; you are to come back with me, and I will show you London. A different London to what you are at present acquainted with. My friends shall be your friends. How they will admire you! How you will like them! In a month you will not regret Cromarty. My dear, these stuffy, mournful lodgings will simply kill you if you remain."

Kathrine Daly's manner had quite changed. It was now all animation. Christie, who had anxiously stood apart, raised her hands, and, with moistened eyes, murmured:

"Noo, the gude Lord bless her. It's the mercy o' Providence. She'll save the lassie."

But Gwen had drawn back with a feeble protest.

"No, no," she remarked—"indeed no."

"But I say yes," laughed Kathrine Daly. "What do you say, you honest old body?"

"Jest yes, mem, as you say yesel'. Oh, mem, ye are doin' wonders."

"There! the majority is against you, so it's settled. It's no compulsion, only you must. 'Stand not upon the order of coming, but come at once.' That's Shakespeare, slightly altered. Now, I dare say you have never heard of him?"

"Oh, but I have, madame," answered Gwen, laughing despite herself. "I used to read his play 'The Tempest,' beneath the rocks, listening to the long, great waves breaking on the shore, thinking that possibly they might, before reaching Inesscauld, have washed Prospero's isle itself."

The actress regarded her reflectively.

"I wonder if she would make an actress?" she thought; then aloud: "My child, you must not call me 'madame.' Are we not friends? Madame indeed! No, you must, you fair, white dove"—putting her arm round her—"call me Kathrine, and I shall call you Gwen—Gwen," she repeated, drawing her brows. "I don't like it. It sounds harsh; besides, if that past is to be dead, why not bury the name, too, and begin the new life afresh with me? I'll call you Undine—the Spirit of the Waters. Now"—taking her decision for granted—"we will make ready for our flight."

She bustled here and there: so

Making sunshine in a shady place,

that the women's hearts were cheered and warmed toward her. Speedily all was arranged. Gwen was to go home with her in the victoria that was waiting, and later Christie was to follow in a cab with her small belongings.

When Gwen donned her cloak and hat, Kathrine regarded her rather doubtfully.

"We must change all that," she pondered. "Yet, after all, there's something fetching in its unfashionable simplicity. Besides, what may not beauty wear? With that pure complexion, those large, tender eyes, only the women will criticise the dress—and who cares for them?"

The victoria, with the groom in livery, was the last straw to Christie's astonishment and admiration. It rendered Gwen more nervous. Her fingers clung about Christie's. Had she had the courage, she would at the last moment have not gone—at least without her old friend.

But Kathrine Daly had made her influence felt, and with a whispered "Come soon, Christie, dear," she stepped into the carriage, and, with a little flutter at the grandeur of the commencement of the "new life," was driven to her new home.

The change of Gwen's name had not been a sudden idea, but arrived at after consideration. Kathrine Daly was now in London, on her own ground, prepared to defy Fairfax Drayton. Nevertheless, she desired no immediate encounter. She hoped to have won Gwen's affection so as to exert control over her before the knowledge that the girl was beneath her roof reached his ears.

This might be easy, as Fairfax, for reasons not difficult to

understand, had long drawn away from that society in which Kathrine Daly moved. But were Gwen ever mentioned by name in his presence, he would at once guess the truth.

Still, as she glanced at the young girl by her side, she almost longed, with malicious triumph, that, despite the consequences, Fairfax Drayton could have seen them thus together.

CHAPTER XX.

IN PERIL.

"WHAT a lovely morning! Do you drive out to-day, Kathrine?"

The speaker was Gwen, attired in a gray morning-dress, trimmed with black ribbons, standing at the window of the actress's boudoir, looking down into the road, golden in the sunshine.

For a month Gwen had been leading her new life, and though the sadness in her eyes was still there, much enhancing their attraction, the change was apparent. The languor had given place to a gentle, subdued tone and manner.

To the pure all things are pure, and, harmlessly, she mingled with Kathrine's shady society.

Unable to compare, she saw no wrong; ignorance blinded, while purity was her shield. She believed that those around her were specimens of London society; and though she often pined in thought for the quiet freedom of Inesscauld, she did not shrink from those about her.

Gratitude made her believe the actress all that was good and noble; a belief old Christie did much to strengthen.

In her opinion, Kathrine Daly had plucked her dear lassie back from the dark grave; and to speak evil of her who had done this would have set all the old body's Scotch ire aflame.

That month had been a world of wonders to Gwen. The splendid West End thoroughfares, the shops, the parks, the Drive, the Row, and the people. And then the theater. Ah! Gwen would never forget her "first night." The breathless awe, akin to fear, with which, from a box, she regarded the crowded house, the sea of faces, the huge chandelier hung on high, the immense curtain concealing new mysteries from view.

Ah! when it rose!—no words could describe her sensations then. They amounted almost to pain.

"Well," had asked the actress, when she sent for her round to the dressing-room, "what do you think of it?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Gwen, pale and flushed by turns, much agitated; "all my words seem to have gone from me. I can but think—remember. How beautiful—how clever you are! There were none like you."

And taking Kathrine's hand, she pressed it in her own, gazing, her eyes dilated with a child's innocent admiration, upon the other, who, breaking into an amused laugh, said:

"Undine, how would you like one day to be an actress, like me?"

"Like—you," Gwen drew a little back in wonderment. "I think it must be very grand to be an actress, to make people so pleased as they were to-night; but to be like you—so clever, so beautiful. Oh! I could never be that!"

"Who knows?" was the gay rejoinder. "There is nothing like trying. There, I'll teach you. What do you say?"

"That you are very good," replied Gwen tremulously. "Whatever you tell me to do—whatever you think it best for me to do—for I must soon work to live—I will do it willingly. Would that my darling mother had known, or could know, that I have such a friend."

The actress quickly drew away her hand, turning to her dressing-table.

"There, there," she remarked, "we will see about it."

Gwen never knew what that mention of her dead mother had done for her. If Kathrine Daly, in her hatred of Fairfax Drayton, thought at times to drag this object of his love through the mire, soiling its purity, Gwen's gentle innocence, and the name of that dead mother, often spoken of, were as amulets about her neck, shielding her from harm.

One of the first to be introduced to Gwen had been Archie Melton. He had gazed upon her as a botanist might on a flower which he found where no flowers should be.

In an atmosphere where he recognized so much that was meretricious, and nothing as real, he naturally placed Gwen on the list, and thought her pose as the youthful *ingénue* was remarkably fetching and well sustained.

"You are right as to your new attraction," he said to Kathrine. It is such a rare rôle adopted in your salons that for that very reason it will take."

The actress regarded him quietly, then smiling answered: "I hope you like her?"

"She is charming. Her unsophistication is quite an amusing study. Is she to appear on the boards?"

"That the future must determine. Stay; let me give you a word of advice. Don't fall in love with her."

"Why?"

"Such an attraction ought to look higher. Is it not so?"

"Certainly. Thanks for the hint," good-humoredly.

But the young journalist had strolled downtown with Gwen's face vividly retained in his memory.

From that hour, on entering the actress's drawing-room, Archie Melton's eyes wandered at once in search of Gwen; he lingered by her side, glad in his heart, yet half irritable that it was so, to see the smile with which she welcomed him. The fact being that Gwen had begun to look for him, even as he for her, finding—though she could not have explained why—more pleasure and comfort in his society than in any of those to whom she already was an attraction.

One who had also frequently lounged over to talk with her was Marmaduke Helmore, the guest who was described with the somewhat Mephisto countenance. Him Gwen rather feared. He would stand, his finger-tips just resting in his trouser pocket, his thin, tall form seeming to tower over her,

and—while he uttered his brief sentences, the gray eyes, in expression totally distinct from his words—seeming to look into her very soul, as a clever doctor diagnosing a case.

Dislike him she did not, but she feared him, and always breathed freer when he strolled away.

It must not be imagined that in this new life, with its round of occupations and amusements, Gwen had forgotten the old. On the contrary, at times her spirit yearned for Inesscauld; to feel the fresh, invigorating morning breeze upon her cheek, and to hear the pulse-beat of the sea.

In her pretty room she and Christie would sit talking of the dear old days. If Fairfax Drayton were not openly mentioned, often was he in their minds.

Was he ever out of Gwen's? No. Did she not wear that letter suspended round her neck, reposing on her heart, to which she would press it tight—tight, as she lay awake of nights, thinking? She had forgiven him; forgiven his making the sweetest portion of her woman's life an impossibility, for never could she love again. Why hide it? She could not from herself. She loved him still, she pitied him, and, for her life, would not have seen him again, fearful of her own weakness and the influence he had over her.

"Keep us apart—O God, keep us apart!" she prayed, in anguish of spirit; "for were he to say again, 'Come, my darling, come,' Heaven forgive me, but struggle as I would—I should risk all, accept all, and go. Keep us apart."

So a month had slid away, not unhappily, to Gwen. More than once she had spoken of the necessity for her to think of the future, though, to her and Christie, their two hundred pounds had seemed inexhaustible; but the actress, who had taken more to Gwen than she would have believed possible, ever had some excuse; and her *protégée* yielded in all things.

Kathrine Daly had naturally questioned her in regard to her mother's source of income—for even at Inesscauld one must have something to live upon; but in the hurry and trouble, the address found in the desk had been lost, and beyond that Gwen knew nothing.

Being a woman conversant with the world, the actress guessed that, as Mrs. Fane's death had not been notified, the quarterly payment would be made as usual, which rendered her position rather awkward.

Gwen ought not to lose the money, she ought to write to Inesscauld for the letter to be forwarded; but did she give her address in London, Fairfax Drayton might easily trace her out, and that he would endeavor to do so she felt assured.

Her difficulty was ended by discovering that the date upon which the money arrived had elapsed by nearly a fortnight; consequently, that the letter would have been sent and returned before she could prevent it.

"It can be recovered," she said; "do not distress yourself about it, Undine. Leave it to me."

Gwen did implicitly, having, indeed, no one else to leave it to; but Kathrine Daly was the very last to whom she should

have left it. In her numerous occupations, her style of life, she had small time to give to other matters—especially at this period, when she hoped the ambition of her theatrical life was about to be realized.

So the days went by, and though Gwen often thought that she must do something, yet nothing was done, save when Kathrine Daly gave her a brief quarter of an hour or so's instruction in the histrionic art. Hence, on this bright morning, when she put the interrogation respecting the drive, her future was as uncertain as ever.

"It is lovely," responded the actress, who, in a handsome morning toilet, was writing at the table; "but in a quarter of an hour I expect Marmaduke Helmore, so shall not drive until the afternoon."

Gwen reflected awhile, then said:

"Kathrine, who is Marmaduke Helmore?"

"My dear Undine, I should be wiser than society in general if I could tell you," was the laughing rejoinder, as, putting down her pen, she leaned back in her chair. "He is a society mystery. How he lives, where he lives—for it is not always at the address he gives—no one knows; and as to that, no one cares. At times there is an unmistakable film of poverty over his clothes. Nevertheless, he always dresses like, and looks, a gentleman. He is an *habitué* behind the scenes, and has the *entrée* to the green-rooms. He is admirably well informed upon most matters, and is valuable in giving advice upon affairs such as that upon which I am about to consult him this morning. Why should I trouble to learn more? I like him; but if you ask me what is my secret belief, I reply that I shrewdly suspect the green cloth is his principal study. Oh, you charming piece of innocence! you do not understand. Well, that he plays cards for money, and generally wins. After that—why, I fancy he is one of your admirers."

"Mine!" exclaimed Gwen. "No, indeed."

"You dislike him?"

"No; neither do I like him. In fact, as he stands, his eyes seeming to pierce right through me, I scarcely know what are my feelings."

"If you deny him to be an admirer," proceeded the actress, with a humorous glitter in her eyes, "you cannot that Sir Evelyn Lynton is certainly mashed by your *beaux yeaux*."

Gwen's fair brow darkened, her expression became one of blended fear and repulsion.

"Of my dislike to him there is no doubt," she said. "A strange, chill shudder comes over me, Kathrine," she proceeded, approaching, sitting on the ottoman at her friend's feet, resting her arm across her knee, and looking into her face, "whenever he enters the room. I think I am aware of his presence without seeing him. Yes, indeed; only the other night I was talking with Archie Melton, thinking of nothing but what we were saying, when my voice suddenly stopped, and through my veins ran a creeping cold. Without will of my own I looked round, and Sir Evelyn was stand-

ing close by me, with that look that makes me dislike him."

"Love should beget love."

"Love!" Gwen stared at the speaker, then broke into a merry laugh. "Love! Why, he is nearly fifty."

"But rich, my dear."

"I suppose so; for the other evening he brought me some lovely flowers—orchids, he called them—asking me to wear them as a breast-knot. When I took them—for I could not refuse, could I? though I should have liked to; but I remembered you always accepted flowers—well, on taking them, I found they were held together by a diamond ring."

"For you, too?"

"I suppose he meant it so."

"You took it?"

"No; I said I would keep the flowers, but not that. He would persist in trying it on my finger. It fitted, and he said it must not come off. But I took it off, and gave it him back."

"If you had remembered, you would have known I take rings, too, as well as flowers."

"Ah! it is because you are so clever—it is your due. But you would not from Sir Evelyn, if you felt as I do against him," shuddering. "When he left, I gave the flowers to Archie Melton, asking him to throw them out of the window."

"And what did Archie Melton say?"

"Nothing; but for a moment stood looking at them and me, then tossed them away, laughing as he cried, 'There goes the luck of Edenhall!'"

"And, I suppose, was remarkably gay after?"

"He is always gay and pleasant."

"With you. My dear Undine," putting her fingers under the girl's chin, and tilting her face upward, "are those bright eyes of yours so blind—is your heart so preoccupied——"

"Mr. Helmore!" broke in the voice of the servant, announcing the guest.

Gwen instantly rose to retire; Kathrine Daly did not bid her stay. As she passed from the room, she encountered the visitor on the threshold. He raised her hand to his lips, a few ordinary sentences were exchanged, then Gwen went on into the back drawing-room, out of which led a conservatory that she had made her special care. Her work done, she threw herself on a small couch, and fell into thought.

Suddenly she felt she was not alone. Glancing up, she saw the young journalist, standing just within the lace draperies, watching her. She rose quickly into a sitting position.

"You here!" she exclaimed. "I never heard you."

"Is that so? I really fancied that you had taken that graceful pose to send me to distraction."

"Why should I wish to do that?" smiled Gwen. Somehow, she was never so much the natural, trustful Gwen than in the society of Archie Melton. Even now he held her hand, and she never dreamed of withdrawing it. "Kathrine is with Mr. Helmore, and I am dismissed."

"So were indulging in day-dreams," he remarked, looking into her eyes. "I wonder what they were about?"

"If you wish to know, I'll tell you. I was wondering why Marie Standish behaved as she did the other day? We were driving in the park, when we met her. Kathrine bowed. Marie, with such a look, turned the other way. It hurt Kathrine; she bit her lip and frowned. Why is it?"

Archie Melton gazed at her in silence, then said:

"Undine, you puzzle me. You are a riddle I cannot read. As to Marie Standish, well, she is one of the good, and is far too virtuous to sully the purity of her wings in such society as Kathrine keeps."

"Virtuous! Such society!" Then Gwen's leal partisanship started aflame. "Wherein is Kathrine less virtuous than she?" she exclaimed, indignantly. "What is in this society different to Marie Standish's or any other?"

Archie Melton looked steadily into the pretty, flushed face. A suspicion which for some while had been forcing itself into his mind suddenly gained strength—a suspicion that Gwen's singular innocence of manner in that set, her unsophisticated remarks and simplicity of dress, were not a clever rôle, to render her style of beauty more taking, but natural and true.

Then, great Heaven! what right had she to be in that place? How could he read Kathrine's particular friend but as he read Kathrine's self? And yet there had been that in this sweet girl that so attracted him, rendering the puzzle more difficult to solve.

Now, moved by an impulse he did not stay to analyze, bending a little forward, still holding her hand, he said:

"Undine, will you answer me truly? Do you really not know?"

"Know?"—how quick his pulses were beginning to beat, as those clear, honest eyes met his, eyes full of wonderment—"know what? I do not understand."

"That"—his voice fell low—"the society formed around Kathrine is that society which no pure, virtuous woman could enter—a society that a good mother, such as you have so often spoken about to me, would rather see her daughter dead than one of it. Do you not know that the woman whom a man sees in this house is instantly condemned—that the compliments paid are insults?"

Still obedient to the impulse, the words rushed from Melton's lips like a flood. Nevertheless, when they struck with their full meaning on his ear, he would not, in that resentful state of mind, have recalled them. He saw that Gwen had been deceived; that Kathrine Daly had brought her into that fetid atmosphere for a purpose of her own, the girl being really ignorant of the miasma she breathed.

He liked the actress, he loved Gwen; yet, set that aside, all the honor, the manhood within him, rose in revolt against Kathrine as he regarded Gwen's horror-struck features, into which some light was dawning, a light that at present was all confused; for how can purity comprehend vice? And yet poor Gwen comprehended enough.

"It is not true!" she cried; "it cannot be!"

"Indeed it is," he answered. "Undine, will you trust me? If in ignorance of this society you have been brought into it, not a moment must elapse before means are taken to rescue you before too late. I tell you the very touch of the women here is contamination."

"What am I to do?—what am I to do?" exclaimed Gwen, helplessly, distractedly.

"How can I tell you without you tell me all? Undine, will you trust me?" he ejaculated, earnestly. "Let me but see my way clear, and I swear to save you."

Gwen gazed eagerly into his face then.

"I cannot help but trust you; I cannot help but feel you will not deceive me."

"As there is a God in heaven, I will not!" he rejoined.

Then Gwen told him, often with blushes her hands strove to shut out from his view.

The journalist made but one outspoken exclamation.

"Fairfax Drayton!" he had ejaculated, on hearing his name—nothing more. But, to him who knew behind the scenes of Kathrine Daly's life, it was a revelation. He wanted no other solution to the puzzle.

As was, however, natural he judged the actress too harshly; he attributed to her the worst motives to satisfy her revenge. He revolted with indignation and loathing from so cruel an act, and even while he listened to Gwen his brain was concocting plans for her escape.

There must be no scene—that is, before Gwen. She had seen Kathrine on her brightest side, she should not witness the reverse. Besides, Gwen was of a grateful nature; how could he tell the influence the actress might exert? It should be a war between himself and Kathrine, only without witnesses. No. Let him only get Gwen away safely first.

Just then both were startled by Kathrine's voice. She was in the drawing-room, but, fortunately, only stood at the door. Gwen, leaning forward, saw she was dressed for going out.

"Undine, are you there? I have to go with Mr. Helmore on business. Possibly I shall dine in town. Don't wait—and don't be dull. *Au revoir.*"

"Not *au revoir*, but farewell, if I have my will," murmured Archie Melton, through his clenched teeth, his gaze upon the first woman he had ever loved—Gwen.

CHAPTER XXI.

FLIGHT.

THE journalist had gone. Gwen and Christie were closeted together, with shut doors. The former had told the latter, her only confidant, everything; whereupon the old Scotch woman, starting up, had seized her by the wrist, exclaiming:

"Coom awa', lassie—coom awa'. Not another hour shall ye be in the hoos. Oh, we twa ignorant bodies, to ha'e fallen into the snare, to ha'e been glamoured by soft words. The painted sepulcher, full o' evil and decay. Bairn, coom!"

"Be patient, Christie; be just," said Gwen. "She was good to us—she has been very kind."

"For her ain purpose—her ain purpose, lassie. In the name o' ye dead mither, coom awa'."

"Yes, Christie; but you *must* listen. What are we to do, where go, knowing nothing of London? Besides, I have promised Mr. Melton to trust in him—to be guided by him."

"Lassie, I thought ye'd had eno' o' trustin'."

"Oh, Christie!" exclaimed Gwen, bursting into tears.

"Mees Gwen—my darlin' lassie, forgi'e me. In my wrath, an' in my fear for thee, I knew not what my bitter tongue was sayin';" and the old woman, kneeling, clasped her round the waist. "There, there, dinna greet; jest tell me what's to be done, an' I'll do it, whate'er it be."

"Mr. Melton, Christie, knows a lady who would befriend us; but, of course, he has to ask her, and explain first."

"Ay, ay."

"He wishes me to leave here quietly, and let him explain to Kathrine afterward. I don't like it, Christie. It seems so ungrateful. I would rather tell her all, and say good-by."

"Tell her, an' be wheedled o'er wi' her saft tongue, or be terrified oot o' ye wits by her anger? An' hoo can ye tell, lassie, if she'd no prevent your gangin'? or the ill words she might say o' ye? These hussies are like the boilin' pot—a' fair an' clear until it begins to boil, then the scum cooms to the tap."

In different words, Archie Melton had expressed the same meaning. Gwen told her so, and the plan the journalist had formed. That Gwen should let no difference appear in her manner before the servants. That she should wait a communication from him; then, having written to Kathrine, quit the house while the actress was at the theater.

Listening, Christie approved, and quietly began to make preparation for their departure. It was not a long process,

for Gwen would not take any articles but those brought with them, which indeed went into a small compass.

In obedience to Archie Melton's advice, the girl took luncheon as usual, making it, indeed, her dinner.

The hours that followed were full of dread. At each sound she started, thinking it Kathrine Daly returned.

At first she had more than half wished to see her; but the hysterical terror which possessed her when there seemed a chance, told her that the journalist was wise in his decision.

Five-o'clock tea was brought in, yet no communication had come from Archie Melton. The evening was falling—dusky shadows crept into the room.

Gwen lighted a shaded lamp on a side table. She was growing alarmed and anxious.

Ah! a knock at last! It was he. But surely he would not come himself! Could it be Kathrine? Gwen had been crossing to the door, but at that possibility retreated.

There was a pause, then steps approaching. As the door opened, Gwen with difficulty could prevent crying aloud; the next moment, however, she experienced intense relief, the servant announcing:

"Sir Evelyn Lynton."

The feeling of respite was but momentary. Gwen's satisfaction that it was not the actress was quickly succeeded by nervous dread of the guest it was. Her talk with the journalist, her discovery, had considerably enlightened her upon many things, and she shrunk from this visitor and the thought of a *tête-à-tête* with him.

When our eyes are suddenly opened from mental as physical blindness, all things appear exaggerated, as to him who said he saw "men walking as trees." In every move, glance, and word of Sir Evelyn Lynton, Gwen now read a meaning, and, as he advanced, metaphorically shrunk from him.

"Really this is a pleasure I was far from expecting," he remarked, a brightness in voice and eyes. "When I saw so dim a light here, I feared I should find no one at home."

"Miss Daly is out. I do not know when she will return. I will higher the light."

"Nay, nay," putting his hand on her wrist; "this dim, poetical light suits me, as it must have done you. As to Kathrine, well, I can dispense with her since you are here."

While holding her wrist, ostensibly to prevent her highering the light, his long white fingers increased their pressure, while his eyes gazed full into hers, with the expression which had produced that shuddering feeling.

Gwen sought to release herself. After a more pronounced pressure he let her go, saying:

"You are yet at tea. May I ask a cup?"

"Certainly," replied Gwen, glad to draw away. "This is cold. I will ring for fresh."

"No, indeed," following her; "the cooler the better for the flame that is consuming me here," placing his hand on his heart. "If you would but give it me in your own cup," bending forward, "the nectar of the gods would not equal it."

Gwen, a trembling seizing her, looked into his face.

He misread her. Sitting down on a low chair by her side, leaning toward her, he whispered:

"How kind of Kathrine to be absent, to afford us this charming *tête-à-tête!* Will you tell me how you manage it, what potent secret you possess, that you are more beautiful every time I see you? To-night you are lovely. My queen!"

Suddenly she felt his arm about her waist, drawing her toward him, his smiling face approaching hers.

She sprung up and tried to beat him back, but he had caught her so as to imprison her arms, and she was helpless.

"Let me go—release me!" she cried. "Sir Evelyn! How dare you? Let me go!"

"You ask too much, darling. Nay, you are not so cruel. One kiss. Listen, Undine; I love you. Be still, and hear me. Do you like dresses? You shall have them; diamonds? They shall be yours. I love you; ask what you will——"

"Let me go, Sir Evelyn!" cried the girl, terrified, struggling in his embrace. "Let me go; I *hate you!*"

"Well done. For that cruel little speech you must pay the penalty."

His lips approached hers. Wildly struggling, she averted her face, and they fell again and again, like hot rain, upon her white throat.

Oh, the horror of that contact! She screamed aloud, then called, in agony:

"Christie—Christie! save me!"

Swift as lightning, the door was flung open; Christie, in all the majesty of indignant, virtuous wrath, was in the room. A moment, and her old hands gripped the baronet's shoulders like a vise—he being off his guard, and ignorant of who was his assailant—and sent him spinning, until he fell, overturning, with a crash, a table covered with bric-a-brac.

Gwen had dropped on to her knees, and, her face buried on the cushion of the chair, was sobbing hysterically with fear and humiliation.

Such was the scene the subdued rays of the lamp disclosed. The dominant figure was Christie's, whose Highland blood was up.

"Ye vile, creeping thing!" she cried, towering over the prostrate Sir Evelyn, who was gazing at her in confused wonder; "if it were na' for bein' hangit, I'd kill ye, and crush the bad life oot o' ye where ye lay. But, by the Lord! if ye daur sae much as lay a finger on the lassie again, I *will* murder ye, an' no' care for the hangin'."

Moving to Gwen, taking her arm, she continued, hurriedly:

"Coom awa'—coom awa' this instant. Not anither minute shall you remain in this evil hoos."

Gwen eagerly arose and left the room with her.

Their small valise was already packed. Hurriedly Christie assisted the girl in tearing off the dress she wore, to replace it with the dark one in which she had come.

Once more Gwen donned the cape and hood which so vivid-

ly recalled the happy days at Inesscauld; then, side by side, they descended the stairs, Christie grasping her umbrella as a weapon of defense and offense, if the servants—as was possible—should try to prevent their egress.

But, attracted by the disturbance, they had now dispersed again, never suspecting flight. The hall was empty. They passed out, closed the door softly, and stood in the streets of London, two friendless, homeless, houseless women.

A brougham in the distance aroused them. They feared it might be Kathrine Daly. Quickly they hurried on in an opposite direction. It was not she, and breathlessly they stopped at the end of the road to form some plan.

"Where shall we gae, lassie?" said Christie. "I'm thinkin' it wouldna' do to gang back to our lodgin's; we might be followed by that limb o' Satan."

"No, no, Christie; not back there. Kathrine would follow us. We must find our way to Archie Melton's. I have the address. Is he not seeking a home for us? He will be sending or going to North Lodge. We must prevent that."

"Lassie," crumpling her brows, "hoo can ye tell he's mair to be trusted than the ithers?"

"Christie, so I have asked myself; but I feel that he is to be trusted indeed. We must see him. He will advise us. There—there, Christie, is a hansom. We must ride, for we must lose no time."

Hansoms were, in Christie's opinion, a swift means of destruction, indeed, of voluntary suicide; but in the pressure of the moment she advanced no protest, and soon they were being carried to the journalist's chambers.

On reaching the street in which they were situated, Christie, with a determination not to be shaken, announced her intention of going to the chambers alone.

"It's na reet for young leddies to be gangin' to see young gentlemen at this hour, or, as to that, at any ane. Bairn, wi' the black cloud that ha'e been lately shadowing your purity, ye maun be mair carefu' than maist."

"What, then, will you do, Christie?"

"I'll e'en gae an' see if he's at hame. Then I'll tell him a', an' he can advise us."

So Christie went to the building—one let out in chambers—and ascended to the number Gwen had given her.

To the old Scotch woman it was a new and confusing experience. The corridors, the many doors, the names and numbers puzzled her. She went wrong over and over again. At last the journalist's name on the half-glass door met her view, and, with a joy little short of the Peri's on obtaining entrance into Paradise, she knocked.

Archie Melton was at home. Christie had not been a minute too soon, for he was just about to send a messenger to Gwen. He listened to the old servant's story, flushing with anger and pacing the room, until Christie suggested his sitting down as it made her dizzy to look at him.

"I feared it would come to this all along," he ejaculated. "It was perceptible to all but Undine."

"An' wherefore did ye no' put her on her guard?" cried the old woman.

"Because, finding her in the society I did, being ignorant of the circumstances I now know, I did not fancy she needed it. Only to-day have *I* learned the truth. Let it, therefore, be some excuse for Sir Evelyn, who yet is in ignorance."

"That is sae. An' noo what's to be done, sir? Mees Gwen is waitin'."

"Where?"

"Doon in the street or the ha'. I maun na bide lang, for she is sairly weary."

"Fortunately she may soon have comfort and rest; the lady will receive you at the Home as her own guests, for there are rules which prevent your entering as regular inmates for a day or two. I'll come at once. The house is not very far; a cab will soon take us. Then," he added *sotto voce*, "to see the actress. By Jove! there *will* be a scene. I must brace my nerves for the encounter."

Turning out the lamp, he led Christie downstairs far quicker than she had found her way up. Where was Gwen? They could see her nowhere. She was not in the hall nor in the street. Christie was alarmed. What could have become of her?

"I left her here—just here," she said, "looking into the street at the folks. She stood just in the shadow here, for she no cared to be seen. Folks luke at her in London, wi' her cloak an' hood."

"Perhaps she went further back," said the journalist, whose concern was as great as Christie's. In this day he had learned his own secret—how dear Gwen was to him.

While speaking, he stepped to the end of the hall beyond the radius of light, and there he found her extended on the stone floor, insensible, motionless, pale as death.

They believed it was through the shock she had received, and nervous exhaustion. Even as the journalist raised her head, resting it against his breast, she began to recover.

Sitting up, she gazed anxiously around, covered her face, trembling, then looking round again, murmured:

"Forgive me—let us go from here, please; pray let us go."

"Certainly," said Archie, tenderly—very tenderly, with reluctance surrendering her, as with his help she rose to her feet, to Christie. "I will get a cab while you recover yourself. In a brief space you shall be where you can rest. Are you quite sure you are better?"

"Quite. How kind, how good you are," murmured Gwen. "What should we have done but for you?"

She pressed his hand, which was holding hers, and looked gratefully into his face. From that moment hope sprung into vigorous life in the journalist's breast; he felt his future happiness was assured.

Poor Archie! Scarcely had he gone than Gwen, throwing herself on her companion's neck, exclaimed:

"Oh, Christie! I have seen him again."

"Who, lassie?"

"The man I love still. I saw him as I stood yonder. He was passing along in the crowd, looking so careworn—oh, Christie! so—so ill. Christie, his heart, too, is breaking. He just glanced in. His eyes seemed to pierce mine. But he passed on, Christie, he did not know me—he did not—or, perhaps, he has forgotten already. I felt at first I must cry out and follow him; then in terror I ran back here, into the darkness, and remembered no more."

Poor Archie! "The man she loved still."

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT TO DO.

THE Home to which the journalist conducted Gwen and old Christie was a Protestant sisterhood of earnest women, devoting their means and their time to ameliorating the sufferings of those whose existence was a weary battle. Many had been strengthened and saved by these outstretched hands.

Archie Melton knew the principal; and as he had listened to Gwen in the conservatory; as he had recognized the imperativeness of her instantly quitting Kathrine Daly's, wondering where she was to go, he had remembered the sisters.

The principal was a middle-aged lady, tall, graceful, with calm, self-reliant expression, and bright, kindly eyes.

The nervousness with which Gwen regarded her immediately disappeared as, advancing, taking her hand, she said:

"How do you do? I am very pleased to see you. Any friend of Mr. Melton is sure of a warm welcome from us. You can't tell, Miss Fane, how much we owe him," smiling round at the journalist. "Ah! the press is a mighty weapon, either to make your friends or slay your enemies."

"I don't think I do much of the latter," laughed Archie. "I don't believe you have any to experiment upon. What is your opinion, Miss Fane?"

"I think it is not possible," said Gwen; "indeed, Mr. Melton has been a friend to me."

With the impulse of young impulsive natures, she held her hand toward him. The color rushed to his face as he raised it to his lips. Before he could speak, Gwen added, sadly:

"But I fear I am the cause of making *him* a great enemy."

"Pray don't worry yourself on that head," exclaimed the journalist, with an indifference that went no further than words. "You don't know her. There may be a few warm sentences, but I can put it right. I'll see her to-night."

"And," said Gwen, giving him the note, "you will let her have this?"

He turned it in his fingers a moment reflectively.

"Is it as well?" he asked.

"Oh, I *must* say something," pleaded Gwen. "She has been so very kind—you do not know. It would be base ingratitude to leave in silence."

Archie Melton gazed into the pale, pleading face, grown so priceless to him, a moment before he spoke.

The principal, having noted that tell-tale blush, had moved away to talk to Christie, with whom she at once fell in love.

"Certainly," he then said; "she shall have the letter. Have you told her where you are?"

"How could I"—smiling wanly—"when, until now, I did not know myself? See, the envelope is not closed! Will you read what I have written? Do, please—I wish you to."

He hesitated, then complied. It was a rapture never yet experienced, to be thus taken into her confidence—to feel that in all the world she trusted, relied but on him.

Closing the envelope, he said, his eyes bright with emotion: "Could she really have seriously injured you she must have had a heart of stone. Yes, she shall have the letter. Now, can I do anything more for you? How weary and tired you look! I will not be so cruel as to detain you."

"You cruel!" smiled Gwen up into his face, their hands clasped in farewell. "What must kindness and goodness be, then, if you are cruel? When may I see you again?"

How innocently the words were spoken! How her hand lingered in—nay, clung to—his! Was she not once again among strangers? Was he not truly the only friend she had in the wide, wide world, with its dark, impenetrable future?

But lovers are blind. The journalist gave his own reading to her words, her manner; and it set his pulse beating at an abnormal rate. Again he kissed the little hand, wishing how much that already he had the privilege to press its owner's cheek until under the pressure the roses should bloom again.

"All things come to those who wait," he reflected, jubilantly, finally taking his leave, strengthened with armor of proof for his encounter with Kathrine Daly.

No sooner had he gone than the principal, summoning a maid, intrusted Christie to her care, and led Gwen into another room, where supper was prepared. But she could not eat—she was heartsick, and eager for solitude, solitude and darkness, that she might people it with her own visions, and, undisturbed, recall the features—as she had seen them that night—of Fairfax Drayton. How difficult did she find it to retain her tears, created by the thought that again she had seen him and he had passed her unknown.

"I will show you your room," said the principal. "Sleep is the great curative of most of our ills; but you must not worry, nor be distressed. You are safe, here, my child."

"Oh, yes, indeed! I know that," responded Gwen, gratefully. "My trouble now is the future."

"How so?"

"I am poor. I must work to live."

"And how would you work?"

Gwen shook her head. Two pearly drops hung on her lashes.

"I do not know. I am so ignorant how people do make livings. Kathrine said I should be—be an actress, like she is."

"Would you like it?" questioned the principal, gravely.

"Like it?" Gwen raised her eyes in horror. "Be like Kathrine? Oh, no—no—no!"

"My dear," her countenance clearing, "I am glad. Still,

let us be just. You must not judge all by one. There are, thank Heaven, many actresses noble, virtuous women—to whom all honor and respect are due. But the stage is not your *métier*. Think no more of it to-night. If you will leave it to me, I will think for you."

"How kind—how very kind," replied Gwen, earnestly.

Waiting her in her room simply furnished, but clean and bright, she found Christie, charmed with everything and every one. Gwen was glad to let her run on talking, staying for no reply, never guessing that the old Scotch woman talked just in the hope of interesting her, and taking her thoughts from her own sad life, her heart near breaking when she looked upon the sad, wan face.

Christie would not leave until Gwen was safely in bed.

"Now, bairnie, sleep well," she said.

"And dream!" exclaimed Gwen, putting her arms round her. "Dream of him, Christie; there is no sin in that, is there? And if there be, I cannot help it, for dreams are beyond control. Besides, in my dreams he is as he was at first, and so am I. Christie, the other night I—I dreamed that we were really married; that I was lying in his arms, and he was fondly smiling down into my face as he did once. I awoke that morning so—so happy. Christie, it was not wrong—tell me, it was not wrong?"

"Lassie," was the old servant's response, seeing no other way out of the difficulty, "even if it were, it couldna be helpit, seein' it was a dream."

"A dream. Ah, yes; for to-night he did not know me. Good-night, Christie; good-night!"

She turned her face on the pillow, and Christie, with a piteous glance, stole from the room. As she closed the door, a sob fell on her ear.

When all in the Home slept, Gwen lay on the floor of her room as at the foot of the throne of Grace, her golden hair flowing over her dress, the pale moonbeams about her, praying that he who had wronged her might be forgiven, and that she might see him once again before she died.

On that same night, two men lay awake thinking of her. One with remorse, longing, and bitter moans. The other with a throbbing joy, a feverish hope which banished sleep. Poor Archie Melton!

The next morning, when Gwen descended to breakfast, which was taken with the sisters, the principal met her, a bright smile on her features.

"I think I have found you something to do," she said; "something more suitable to you, and what you will like. When breakfast is over, I'll tell you. Do not let curiosity spoil your appetite."

Gwen had not much to spoil; and she was anxious to learn the result of the journalist's interview with Kathrine Daly.

On the meal terminating, the principal led her into the room they had occupied the previous evening, when, on their sitting down, she said, taking a letter from her pocket:

"Strangely enough—or, rather, I should regard it as a

kindness of Providence—this arrived this morning from a lady I am slightly acquainted with, owing to her munificent donations to our Home. I have seen her once; she is as beautiful as she is good and kind. I tell you this, because I hope you will soon be acquainted with her, the reason for her writing to me being to ask if I knew any young lady who would be a companion to her, and instructress to one child, aged four. This is what she says: 'I desire not a lady-help, which is neither one thing nor the other. She will be my companion; I hope, my friend. I tell you this that you will understand, when you look to try to suit me, as I know you will."

"Well, I have not looked around. I had no need. I thought instantly of you. From what Mrs. Ascelin says, I am certain you would suit her, and that you would soon be charmed with each other. She leads a very quiet, lonely life, she says. I do not fancy you would object to that?"

"No, indeed," said Gwen, nervously. "Where my heart fails is—whether I, who know so little——"

"My dear Miss Fane," interrupted the principal, "let me make confession. I loaded Mr. Melton with questions before you came. Hence I believe you are the very companion that *would* be suitable. You will be very happy at Westwood."

"I do not doubt that, madame."

"Such a chance will not occur again. They are too rare. May I write and mention you?"

"If you please," murmured Gwen, meaning, "I wish you would not," being nervous and all of a tremble; then she cried: "Oh, no, madame—I cannot leave Christie—she would fret until she died."

"Then here is one of the strongest reasons why you should go to Westwood. Mrs. Ascelin also requires a trustworthy person to superintend the domestic arrangements. Your Christie would be the very thing—is it not fortunate?"

"Yes, truly," murmured Gwen. More new faces, more new scenes; all at once again strange and cold. When would it end? How weary it all was!

"There," remarked the principal, rising, "I will send Christie, and you shall talk it over together. Mrs. Ascelin offers fifty pounds a year. By the way, it would be right to ask Mr. Melton's opinion; he is sure to be here this morning."

"Oh, yes," ejaculated Gwen, catching at a straw; "I think I *ought* to ask his advice."

"Certainly," responded the principal, who began to fancy she saw clearly how the land lay.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

THE journalist, on quitting Gwen, went to his club. He walked slowly, wanting to kill time and think.

He by no means liked the task before him, yet, for the actress's sake as well as Gwen's, he felt he must not shirk it.

It had crossed his mind to let Kathrine believe her *protégée* had fled the house, terrified by the conduct of Sir Evelyn; but he felt the truth must eventually come out, and would rather face the worst boldly than be guilty of deception.

Kathrine acted that night, so he had to wait. He wished the thing was over, but never repented the part he had taken in Gwen's deliverance. When he knew the actress would be returning home, he proceeded to North Lodge to meet her.

It has been stated that the journalist came and went pretty much as he liked at the actress's. Consequently, the servants did not think it strange that, on learning their mistress was yet absent, he walked into the drawing-room to wait.

The lamp was emitting the same dim light as when Gwen had fled from the place. It recalled the scene graphically described by Christie, making Archie Melton's face grow fierce, and his hands clench for a moment. Then he exclaimed:

"It was not so much his fault. What did I believe myself? It is Kathrine who is to blame, and no other. If she suffer, is it not fitting that she should? Why doesn't she come?"

How restless he was! Each luxurious seat might have been the awful chair of the Inquisition, for the rest he found on it. Yet, notwithstanding, he was conscious of a delightful glow of happiness through all his being.

Gwen was saved, and he had saved her. He loved her, and he was morally certain growing love for him was driving any love which might linger for the man who had deceived her out of her bosom.

While pacing to and fro, his foot treading on a black ribbon bow called his attention to it. At once he recognized it as Gwen's. A sensation of horror came upon him, as if it were sentient and he had hurt it. Tenderly he pressed it to his lips; then it struck him that Gwen must have lost it from her dress when struggling with the baronet, and again his teeth gripped tight.

Hark! A vehicle was stopping. It was Kathrine.

Swiftly putting the black bow out of sight, he listened. Was she alone? If not, he must defer his purpose there.

He heard the door open, the quick swish of a woman's gar-

ments up the stairs; then Kathrine, radiant, excited, beautiful, stood before him.

"What!" she exclaimed, gayly, "you here? Bravo! Light the candles, the gas, Archie. Make everything bright and jubilant, then come and rejoice with me, or congratulate me. The wish of my life is realized."

He had lighted the gas brackets on the wall as she spoke; now, turning, he said:

"I think I know, and do congratulate you. You at last will be proprietress of a theater. I wish you success, and money galore."

"Don't doubt but I'll make a pile," she laughed. "Where is Undine? Why is she not here as usual? Is she too overcome by the love you were making to her in the conservatory? You see I have your secret," nodding. "Has *she* guessed it? Please ring the bell; I will send for her. I want her. If she has gone to bed, she must get up."

The journalist had moved toward the bell, but paused.

Kathrine Daly watched him, at first amused, then, with sudden seriousness, she perceived something was wrong.

"Why did you not ring?" she asked. "What is the matter with you?"

"I'll tell you, Kathrine—you had better hear it from me than the servants," replied Archie Melton, bracing himself for the encounter. "There has been a scene with Sir Evelyn; Undine has left the house in terror."

"Scene! What do you mean?" she asked.

He told her.

"And she has run away? Absurd folly! Does she imagine she can live in the world and retain that fascinating innocence of hers forever?"

"Not in *your* world," remarked the journalist, looking very grave. "Kathrine, we have been the best of friends. I would yet continue so; but, at the risk of your anger, I must say you have done a cruel—cruel act."

"Cruel! Pray elucidate."

"In bringing that young girl—innocent—pure—into your world—in sacrificing her to your hatred of Fairfax Drayton."

As Kathrine, furious with passion, sprung to her feet, he saw he had betrayed himself, he had let loose the tigress in her bossom—concealment was now impossible.

"Sacrifice her—Fairfax Drayton!" she cried. "What do you know of this girl? Why do you couple those two together?"

"Fool! idiot! I've done it!" he thought, self-angry. Then, "Kathrine, why should I conceal the truth? It would not be just to you to do so. Undine has told me everything of her sad life."

"I see. All is clear now," said Kathrine, with a mocking laugh. "It is a conspiracy. You would bring this girl to your own lure. You have acted the virtuous knight so that the maiden should cast herself into your manly arms. No wonder she fled from Sir Evelyn's——"

"You know this is not true," he ejaculated, reddening

and biting his lip at the false construction put upon his part in Gwen's flight. "Yes, I will tell you the truth——"

"The plot, rather, you were concocting in the conservatory," she broke in, every nerve quivering with rage.

"Thus far you are correct. For the first time, to-day, in the conservatory, I learned Undine's true position here. That she was living beneath your roof in ignorance of its character. That, in that ignorance, she believed all London society was such as it; that, in ignorance, she shouldered vice, which, had she known, she would have fled from in horror, as she has. Without one word of warning you brought her here, aware that her presence beneath this roof condemned her; aware that there could be but one result—her ending by living your life. Oh, Kathrine, you have a heart! Over and over again have you proved it. How could you have done this thing? How could you?"

He moved slightly away, his back turned toward her. His arms were folded, the quiver of his form betrayed his emotion. The actress saw that even her he had held in some esteem; that he had thought, that he had known her to be better than the world imagined; and by her act in regard to Gwen she had lost this regard, this belief.

One instant of bitter regret was swept away by the reckless defiance of the woman of her class, who, aware to recover the world's forgiveness is impossible, that the gate of return is shut to them, plunge deeper into the black sea, and hold it an insult to be thought better than they are.

"That's very good acting," she laughed, scornfully. "I may be in want of a walking gentleman for the lead; if so, I'll think of you. How generous and honorable and honest you are with your 'truth,' as though I do not read the whole lot at a glance. Do you fancy I have not seen how you have been spooning about this girl, this wife and no wife?"

"Not a word against her, Kathrine," he exclaimed; "you know it is unjust."

"How do I know it?" she scoffed. "Are all saints and saintesses in your eyes but me? You have spirited the girl away for your own ends. Why should I not play the chivalrous and the good, and save her from you, you coward, you sneaking, false friend?"

Again her rage boiled up. Rising, she approached the journalist. Seizing his arms, she said:

"Look here; I'm not one to be played with. Tell me where she is! I will know, even if I seek the law's aid, and make you restore her."

"Do so, by all means," he answered, quietly. "The law will protect her; the world will know the truth, and judge between you and me."

With an oath, she flung him from her, her face, got up as it was, pallid with fury.

"You refuse to tell me?" she said. "But I will find out. If she's ruined by being beneath my roof, I'll not leave my work undone. I'll track her down, I'll render her life wretched—also yours. Whoever she weds—if she weds at

all—it shall not be you. Now go. I've had enough of you. Go; and don't cross my threshold again."

He paused. He was almost glad this was so; and yet the parting pained him. Could he say nothing to soothe her, to restore something of the old feeling? Best not.

He had reached the door, when he remembered Gwen's note. Coming back, he laid it on the table, saying:

"I was asked to be the bearer of this to you."

She recognized Gwen's writing; seized, and seemed about to read it. Hesitating, she said:

"Tell me where she is?"

"I cannot. It is best that I should not."

In a second she had drawn back her arm, then struck him, with all her force, across the face.

Fortunately the blow fell chiefly on the forehead; had it been on the eyes, it might have blinded him. He reeled, unable to restrain a cry.

Quickly, however, recovering himself, without a word he left the room and the house forever.

Let it be said here, *en passant*, that years after, when, broken in health, her beauty faded, her talent gone, Kathrine, in penury and sickness, found herself deserted by all, Archie Melton came back, and was a friend indeed. The fashion of their parting pained him deeply. He had liked the actress; there were many points in her nature to be liked; but now he felt it was war truly upon her side.

"I might have done it better," he reflected. "But I am such a duffer. Still, the result would have been the same."

His depression, as he walked from North Lodge, was soon effaced by his thoughts drifting to Gwen. She was safe. Even if Kathrine discovered her whereabouts—as certainly she would try to do—the journalist knew the girl would never return to the actress's residence, having once quitted it.

He got through the night at last, and as early as was consistent started with his news for the Home. He found Gwen alone, waiting for him.

She yet looked pale and wan, but her eyes brightened, her features grew animated, as he entered. She came eagerly forward to meet him, making his pulses beat with a joyous, assured rapture.

"You have seen Kathrine?" she asked, eagerly. "Is she very angry with me?—with you?"

"Angry?" he rejoined, looking into her face. "How could she help being so—losing you? She was furious. She would have you return——"

"Return?" echoed Gwen, with sudden fear.

"Do not be frightened. You are among those who will protect you, even from her; though were you to meet, I believe no longer would she be able to exert influence over you to your harm."

"No, indeed," softly, but with a firmness that comforted him. "I would die rather than again cross the threshold of her house."

"Then," more brightly, "let us now have done with the

matter, and turn to pleasanter subjects. You told me of this income of your mother. It must not be lost. I must endeavor to find out how to recover it. Tell me all you know."

They sat down side by side, and now fully trusting him, throwing off restraint, Gwen told all she knew.

Then he spoke to her of the Home, whether, if it could be arranged, she would like to stay there.

"I may not do that," she remarked; "I must obtain some employment, so that Christie and I may live. Ah, your friends are very good here—they have already found something I can do."

The heart does not always indorse the gratitude of the lips.

Still, Gwen had been talking over the matter with Christie, who had been so taken with the idea, that she had partly inoculated the girl with her enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, she watched Archie Melton's pleasant countenance as she entered into explanations.

It did not brighten as Christie's. Indeed, it suddenly became grave—for his heart was sinking below zero.

The rôle of being Gwen's knight, her head adviser, was very delightful. Too much so to regard its cessation with equanimity.

"Where is this Westwood?" he asked.

"Near Redhill."

The journalist's gravity began to lift. Redhill was very readily attainable. Still, he hesitated. It is strong self-repression for the thirsty to push the cup of pure sparkling water from their lips. Gwen watched anxiously, then, gently resting her hand on his arm, leaning slightly forward, said:

"It is for you to decide. When the principal told me of this, I answered, you had been so kind, that I ought to ask you. I waited to ask you, and now, whichever way you advise, I will do. Whichever it be, I know it will be best."

The journalist trembled. For a moment he averted his gaze from those trustful eyes. What would he not have given to have clasped their owner in his arms, to have bid her fear not, but trust in him through life—to bid her share his home, his heart, his means!

But something held him mute. The dread of making her imagine that all he had done had not been for her, but for his own selfish ends.

So, putting his hand on the slender fingers that were not withdrawn, he said:

"Will you let me think awhile?"

There was silence, during which Archie Melton was not studying the *pros* and *cons* of Gwen's going, but conquering the lover's selfish self. Finally, he answered:

"If I am to decide, Undine——"

"Please, not that name!" she interrupted, with a shiver. "Were we not to have done with all that? Let it be Gwen."

"Then, Gwen, if I am to decide, I say this proffered engagement is providential. It will be best you should leave London, for Kathrine, in her present humor, should not find

you. She has, at present, much to occupy her, and may soon forget. Redhill is not so far; we still may often meet."

"Oh, I hope so," she exclaimed. "You will let me see you sometimes. I can never forget what I owe you; I never wish to. Are you not the only friend I have?"

It was well for Archie Melton that the good-natured principal, thinking the young people had had long enough time together, entered the room just then, or certainly he would have taken a step that would have severed him and Gwen forever. If ever she brought herself to regard another man as a lover, it was not to be yet.

So the trio in council arranged, that, all things agreeing, Gwen should go to Westwood, the principal undertaking to provide her and Christie with a suitable wardrobe.

Gwen waited, with much nervousness and anxiety, the return reply to the principal's letter to Mrs. Ascelin, while the journalist came, after each country post, to learn the result.

"Quite natural," smiled the principal to the sisters—kind-hearted women, who took great interest in their pretty, sad-eyed guest and the honest-hearted man who loved her.

On the second day Mrs. Ascelin's letter came, apologizing for delay. She had been indisposed. She believed Miss Fane would be in every way suitable as the companion she needed. She considered, from what the principal described, that she should be fortunate in securing her services. Let her come at once—the earlier the better.

So Gwen and Christie's portmanteaus were packed, and the two lone women once more set forth on their travels. The journalist was at Victoria Station to see them depart. Following his advice, they went by an evening train, for Gwen was known to many, and he wanted no frequenter of North Lodge to see her, and carry the clew to Kathrine. For a moment or two they stood on the platform, his hand holding hers, while the principal engaged Christie's attention.

"It seems my fate," sighed Gwen, "to be ever living among strangers."

"Strangers that speedily you metamorphose into friends!" he answered. "Who could help but be friendly to you, little Gwen? Who"—his voice fell—"could help but love you?"

She looked into his face. He fancied a suspicion of the truth dawned in her eyes. If so, it passed.

"Indeed I have been fortunate," she murmured; then, in a lower tone, full of sadness: "Yet love, at times, brings greater misery than joy."

"You will write to me, Gwen? If you require help or advice, you will come to me?"

"Where else could I go?" she answered, with a faint smile. "In these few days you have been my strength, my support—indeed, all in all to me. I shall feel lonely. I shall miss you so much."

Now the doors were being banged by porters whose eardrums must be of iron. Hastily he assisted her to her place.

One last "Good-by," one whispered "Courage—courage,

little Gwen!" the door was closed, and she was borne on her way. The last Archie saw was the sweet girl-face, pale and wistful, turned toward him, and the tears so bravely restrained now falling fast.

Before Redhill was reached, darkness had fallen; and out of the darkness of the yet moonless night the trees and hedgerows loomed spectrally, making so drear and desolate a scene that Gwen felt yet further depressed, she knew not why, and experienced a craving for something she knew not what.

Then came the lights and the bustle of the stations, ever a subject of interest to Christie; then, again, the open country dotted at distant intervals with starry lights, gleaming in house or cottage window. Finally, here was Redhill, to Gwen's nervous dread, though, until then, she thought it never would come.

Outside the station a pony phaeton was waiting for them. When Gwen and Christie got in, it drove off through lanes of spectral elm-trees, along broad country roads, and past handsome houses nestling solitary in their own grounds.

At last, driving through a carriage gate, they drew up before a villa, all trellis, lattice windows, and roses. The door was opened instantly, letting out a flood of welcoming light and Gwen stepped into her new home.

The parlor-maid led her across the hall, opened a door, and ushered her into a prettily furnished drawing-room, both tasteful and refined, contrasting strongly with the over-ornate, meretricious glitter of the actress's.

At a table a lady sat reading by a shaded reading-lamp. Rising, she advanced, a singularly lovely, graceful woman, surprising Gwen with her youth; a lovely face, but clothed in sadness.

Sweet as was the countenance, the musical voice was sweeter; also the smile, as she spoke to Gwen, standing weary, half afraid, within the room.

"Welcome, Miss Fane, to Westwood. I trust your residence here will be a long and pleasant experience. I intend to make it so. You look tired. Come and sit down. You must have some tea." Then drawing Gwen gently toward the lamp, she added: "Let me look at you. Poor child!" gazing into her face, and speaking so low and kindly, "we ought to be friends, for I see each has had her sorrow."

The sympathy brought the bright drops into Gwen's eyes, blinding her, else she would have seen there were tears, too, in the speaker's own.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DESERTED.

WHEN Claude came out of that death-like swoon, it was for a time to succumb to fevered delirium.

What had happened? Whatever that letter contained—and, as the young wife lay helplessly before them, the servants would not have hesitated to discover, had they had the opportunity—was a mystery—for the letter had disappeared.

As they tried to bring her out of that dead insensibility, in whispers they queried what did it mean? The nurse had the most to say, hence felt herself a person of importance.

Over again she described the strange look on the squire's face that day on the terrace, when he had plucked the letter from little Bryan's hand. Also his expression that very evening, when she had brought Stanley to him in that very room.

There must have been a quarrel. Now they thought of it, there had been a difference lately in the husband—small trifles that would have passed unnoticed, but for this great one.

Which was to blame? Not he; surely not. Everybody knew the squire, and would believe no ill of him. Not she. Had not some of them known her from the first day of her married existence? There was no wrong in her.

They could but gaze and wonder.

Should they send for the doctor? The old housekeeper—a woman of intelligence—hesitated. She felt that some grisly skeleton had peeped out of the family closet of the Ascelins, and wondered, "Would my lady like it?"

"Let us wait a while," she said. "I believe she is coming to. Raise her on to the couch, then all of you go. The poor lady will be angry to see you standing staring there."

Soon after Claude had come slowly back to terrible consciousness. Uttering a low, moaning cry, she had started up, gazing about her with scared eyes. Then perceiving the housekeeper, with violent effort at self-control, said, pressing her hair from her temples:

"Have I been ill? Ah, yes! I remember. I—I was indisposed, and came home early. What is the time? And where—where is Mr. Ascelin?"

The housekeeper answered both interrogations. When she said the squire had gone out, and not returned, Claude sprung to her feet, and cried, her hands to her temples:

"Oh, my God! My brain is on fire! Leave me, I tell you—leave me!"

The housekeeper obeyed, but stood outside, listening.

Claude was loved by every one, and she feared. All that was audible were stifled sobs, bitter weeping.

At the end of an hour the housekeeper had scarcely time to get out of sight, the door opened, and Claude came forth. Stonily white and calm, she ascended to her own room, when the bell rang for her maid.

"She was not well," she said, "and would retire to bed. She believed she had caught a chill at the garden-party. She feared it was fever—she would see a doctor on the morrow, perhaps. Let all of them go to bed—none need sit up. It was not likely the squire would return that night."

Wearily, saying she longed for rest, she lay down. But no sooner was the house still, than she arose; and in her dressing-gown, her hair loose, went wandering through the rooms.

In the squire's study her grief had its way. Hysterically weeping, she kissed his gloves, she clasped them to her bosom; she knelt at his chair, and, sobbing, prayed.

"Oh, my darling—my darling!" she moaned. "Have I ruined your noble life? Why have you fled thus from me? Why not have stood up and accused me here? Why write, leaving me no chance of reply? Why? Was it not out of pity for me you would not look upon me? I know it, for I know your generous heart. Yet, had you stayed, I would, humbly at your feet, have confessed all. Now you are hiding from me, carrying that fearful burden of sorrow. Oh, that guilty secret! The blame is mine. What can I do? Oh, Heaven! my husband!—my life!—would I could die for thee!"

In the fevered delirium upon her, she felt she must suffer, she ought to suffer, as penance for that fatal secret; that doing so physically it might propitiate Heaven—even as the anchorite lashes his shrinking flesh with the knotted cord.

Opening the windows, taking off her slippers, she stepped, with bare feet, upon the terrace.

The moon was casting the dark shadows of the trees upon the grass like "broken pieces of night." There was no sound, save the wild beating of her heart, as along the terrace she went slowly, like the haunting spirit of the place, down the old steps, down the avenue, to the spot where, in coming up it, the house first broke upon the view.

It was at this point that Evan, her young husband, had, on their coming from their honeymoon, placed his arm around her, kissing her on the lips, and bidding her welcome home, with sweeter words besides, ending that never would they part—nay, not for a day, until death.

Here Claude knelt, her eyes on his home—the home she had driven him from—and prayed Heaven to let them again meet, if it were but for an hour, or send her death that should free him from her, if so it would be best for him.

"Take my life—O Lord, take my life!" she cried, "since you have left my bosom desolate!"

In delirium she tore her dressing-gown from her throat, as if to aid the flight of her soul; then cast herself down,

pressing her aching breast against the hard, cold gravel, kissing it with her quivering lips, as if it were the icy lips of death, who alone could bring her relief from this fearful agony of brain.

The frenzy passed. Rising, she returned to the house and noiselessly ascended to her room.

On her way she entered that of her little son. O God, how desolate it looked! Could the mother behold that empty, pretty nest, and her heart not break? There was the little bed, the coverlet thrown back, the sheet yet impressed from his tiny form. Claude cast herself upon it, weeping.

"Oh, my boy—my boy!"

On leaving, her eyes rested on the door of the adjoining room, where slept the little Bryan. She recoiled from it in horror. But the injustice of the feeling struck her.

"Poor innocent! poor sufferer!" she cried, in her morbid delirium. "You are not to blame—not you, unhappy child!"

By an effort she forced herself to enter the chamber and look upon the boy. Strange—but now she seemed to see the likeness to Stanley more strongly than ever. So strong, that she could not refrain from clasping the child in her arms, and showering kisses on his cheeks.

When morning dawned, Claude, seeming to come out of a trance, found herself seated in her own room, shivering with cold. How she had passed the night she could but vaguely remember. Dizzy, exhausted, she lay down in bed, and finally sunk into unconscious slumber.

She awoke, too weak for more than passive endurance. The severe cold she had caught was sufficient excuse for her repugnance to eat and keeping to her own room.

She was anxious to obtain news of Evan Ascelin. She told herself he *must* be found. The how was the difficulty. Always having had others to act for her, she knew not how herself to act.

Where was she to look for help—advice? How was she to hide the truth from the neighborhood? How, for the squire's sake, rescue the name of Ascelin from scandal and shame?

The first thing to accomplish the latter was to mask her own feelings, her own concern.

She gave it out that the squire had gone for a while abroad. She implied that they had had a slight difference. Both had been foolishly angry. The squire had been in the wrong; but she expected in a few days to join him.

"Would to God I could!" she thought, with a spasm of agony.

But she had resolved to quit Ericfield.

In the squire's letter of accusation, he had said there should be no public scandal, if it could be avoided, for his name's sake—for their boy's sake, and—yes, lastly—for hers. That an income—the amount he specified was most generous—should be allowed her, and she might reside in Ericfield as long as she pleased.

At first Claude had determined to refuse the income, but she finally resolved to accept it.

"At least," she reflected, "I *am* his wife. I will not disgrace him further."

But to leave Ericfield she was decided. First, to escape the pain of living there, with all the terrible mystery about her seething in people's minds; secondly, because away she could prosecute her search for her husband without creating talk and surmise.

Naturally, it had occurred to her that she might obtain a clew of him from his solicitors or bankers.

But to each of her applications came the same answer.

A letter of instruction had been received from Evan Asceline, the postmark London, W. C. Beyond that they were as ignorant of his whereabouts as herself.

It was evident that, for a time, at least, he purposed effacing himself altogether from everyone.

As speedily as she was able, unhappy Claude carried her trouble from Ericfield. She gave out that she was going to rejoin the squire abroad, affecting a cheerful bearing, which nearly broke her heart. Did they believe her? She scarcely cared. All she craved was to be away and alone.

If only she could die! If she could know she were dying and Evan could be found, and would come to her once! If she could tell him everything! She knew if she were dying, he would forgive—even might bestow a farewell kiss.

"I must find him!—oh, I must!" was her mental cry.

For this she quitted Ericfield, taking the little Bryan with her. She had thought of leaving him behind, but the boy, his eyes brimming with tears, had said, so pathetically:

"And are *you* going, too? Am I to be here alone, with no one to love?"

Then the desolation in her own breast made her compassionate his, and she answered:

"No; you shall come with me."

The little lad's eyes glowed at the promise.

"With you," he said, "I shall not so mind about the squire and Stanley. Shall we soon see them?"

Claude turned away to hide her quivering lip, for voices in the air seemed to whisper in her ear, "Never—never!"

For long she lived quietly in suburban apartments, prosecuting her search for the squire. All in vain. The detective could not strike out a clew.

Then she felt he had indeed determined to go from her—that this search would cause him pain, possibly anger.

"I will look no more," she thought. "I will live my life, one in which there shall be no offense; and, seeing this, one day his heart may yearn for me, as mine does hourly for him. Then he may come once before death has called me home."

So she took Westwood, and lived her quiet, solitary life, the intense affection of the little Bryan growing a great consolation to her.

When the time came that he must be educated, she decided to have a governess, dreading to send him among other children, who might question him of his past. Therefore

she wrote to the principal of the Home, stating minutely her requirements, as "the lady would be a companion to herself."

No sooner had the two looked upon each other than they were mutually attracted. Sorrow oftener makes heart akin than joy. Of Gwen's history Claude knew nothing, save of her mother's recent death, her coming to London friendless, with but little means. The principal herself knew scarcely more. Archie Melton had been told Gwen's troubles in confidence, and had not broken trust.

So this new life promised to be one of peace and charm to the girl—a summer sea after nights of wintry storm—a haven of rest, following much sad beating about the rocks. It was not dear Inesscauld, but it was far nearer to it than North Lodge. To Bryan, "Claude's *protégé*," her heart was drawn, as it was to most children, as were theirs to hers. In Inesscauld, when Gwen came near, baby eyes would smile, and tiny waxen hands be stretched toward her.

On the morning following her arrival, Claude had entered the morning-room, leading the boy by the hand, to make him acquainted with Miss Fane. The child had grown much, and a fine boy, slender but well built, he approached with hand extended, his eyes fixed on Gwen with a curious, observant expression common in children.

The girl, kneeling, put her arms about him, drawing him to her, smiling.

"So you are my little pupil," she said; "I am sure we shall be friends. I shall like you. You will like me."

"I like you already," returned the child, frankly, his clear eyes fixed on hers.

What was it in their expression, in the way they regarded her, which made Gwen start, then turn pale? What was it in them that, like a flash, brought to her mind the man she loved? Was this boy like him? No—and yet——

"What is it?" broke in the child's voice. "How pale you are! Are you ill?"

"Ill!" with a forced gayety, seeing the speech had drawn Claude's attention to them, "What makes you think so, dear? Will you kiss me?" And she laid those trembling lips on those fresh, cool as rosebuds, of the boy.

He was allowed to breakfast with them, and during the meal Gwen watched in vain for a recurrence of that likeness to Fairfax. After, however, when over his books he would look up with that earnest, serious expression, the resemblance came back so forcibly that she was almost alarmed.

What did it mean? How could his strange likeness exist? Who was this child? She would have asked Claude, had she not as yet felt too nervous; but from Christie, however—Christie, who was delighted with the new order of things—she learned what the servants believed. Bryan was an orphan, without money or friends, and Claude, in pity, had taken him under her charge, having recognized that the child possessed great artistic talent, which she was cultivating.

"You see," remarked the cook, "ladies who have more money than they spend generally get hold of fads."

The little she heard from Claude confirmed Christie's intelligence, with this difference, that Bryan's parents were not known, and Gwen got it into her foolish head that, because of the likeness, he must be in some way related to Fairfax, so the boy became dear to her in consequence.

"You spoil him, Miss Fane," remarked Claude, with one of her sad smiles. "Yet I will not interfere. He is getting on so well. You have the true secret of teaching children; you gain their respect and love."

Thus, in this pleasant life, autumn drifting into winter, winter toward spring, Gwen's wounds almost began to heal. These two, with a secret melancholy in each heart, became friends, feeling a mutual happiness in the other's society.

As Gwen's nature was the reverse of ungrateful, she recognized her indebtedness to the journalist for all this, and, never suspecting the joy she occasioned, nor the hope to which she was giving rise, never tired of telling him so. They corresponded frequently by his request.

"I shall so like to know how you get on," he said, "and that you are not annoyed from that quarter which shall be nameless. I now shall be able to learn nothing save from you."

For he had been offered the post of war correspondent, and, the terms being most liberal, had felt bound to accept it, that he might the sooner form that home he hoped and believed Gwen would one day share with him.

Aware that war correspondents come, at times, to serious grief, he had deemed it honorable not to confess his passion until his return.

Ignorant of the affection she unconsciously was fostering, Gwen's life flowed smoothly on. She was content—even, in a way, happy. Each day lessened her pain, if not her love. Why should not this peaceful existence last forever?

Forever? Poor Gwen; in that clear sky above your head already is a cloud, which, increasing, soon will break.

CHAPTER XXV.

A COUNCIL OF THREE.

On the whole, Kathrine Daly had proved a success as a manageress. For the time she was the public's favorite—ephemeral favoritism. Her day would pass as her numberless predecessors' had. But favorites never believe that possible in their particular case, so take no warning.

North Lodge had been exchanged for a dwelling furnished with princely luxuriance. The actress one evening sat talking with Sir Evelyn and Markham.

The conversation had been chiefly upon professional matters. Actors and artists are of all people most addicted to talking "shop." But a pause had abruptly ensued. A subject or criticism had been started, which produced reflection. Kathrine Daly leaned back, her highly ornamented slippers *en evidence* on the fender-stool, her arm behind her head, her eyes hidden by her drooping lashes.

Opposite, the baronet was gazing up at the fresco ceiling, whispering a whistle.

Between, sat Marmaduke Helmore; his elbow on his knees, his hand grasping his pointed beard, his eyes on the fire.

He was the first to speak, bringing the eyes of his companions quickly upon him.

"By the way, Kathrine, have you never heard or discovered any trace of the girl Undine?"

"Neither the one nor the other, thanks to Archie Melton; a debt which I hope one day yet to pay."

"By Jove!" laughed Helmore. "I fancy you owe Sir Evelyn a debt, too. It was he apparently who made the bird take wing so swiftly."

"How could I tell that the interior of the little saint was in harmony with the exterior; that the girl was as innocent as she looked?" said the baronet.

"Had you known, of course you would have been more discreet," remarked Helmore, "or more cautious."

"What I might have been, Heaven knows," was the response, as the speaker, rising, approached a table whereon stood decanters and glasses; "but, curious as it may sound to you two, I really loved her."

"And would have married her?" laughed the actress.

"I'd marry her to-morrow if I could find her," replied the baronet, returning to his chair.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Helmore.

"It isn't nonsense; it's human nature. When I first saw

her I determined to win her. I'm more determined still, now I'm aware she is such a charming bit of unsophistication."

"I wonder, under those circumstances," remarked the actress, with scarcely concealed acerbity, "you have not tried to find her."

"I have," was the cool rejoinder. "I am trying still. Look here, Helmore, you're often hard up, I know"—Sir Evelyn had cause to—"fifty pounds if you find the little saint."

"For you to wed, eh?"

"If I must, I must," said the baronet. "I'm resigned. But have my way I will. If you can assist me, I'll cap the fifty with another."

"If Helmore helps you, I shall have a word to say, because he did not help me," said the actress.

"You never asked my services, Kathrine, *ma chère.*"

"I never offered to reward you for them, *mon cher.*"

"Don't for Heaven's sake, quarrel, you two," put in the baronet. "I should imagine, Kathrine, if Helmore helps me, and by his means I marry the girl, thus cutting out Archie Melton, we should both be instruments of your vengeance. You would kill two birds with one stone."

A gleam of intelligence lighted the actress's countenance.

"I never regarded it from that point of view!" she exclaimed. "You are right. Perhaps I could not have a better revenge on her than helping to make her your wife."

The baronet laughed good-humoredly.

"*Brava, ma belle.* I wonder if a pretty woman ever existed who was not jealous?"

"I fancy you may leave out the adjective," said Helmore, with a cynical smile. "Pretty or plain, they are all alike—I believe the plainest are the worst. *Mais revenons à nos moutons.* Wherever in all this world, Kathrine, did you pick up the girl? Who is she?"

"Did I never tell you? No, I remember; I promised to keep her secret. The promise is no longer binding. I met the girl at Cromarty, but she had come from some outlandish wilderness called Inesscauld."

"Inesscauld!" repeated Helmore, looking up quickly.

"So she said. There she had gone through the ceremony of a Scotch marriage with a gentleman whom I recognized as already the husband of another woman yet living. I informed her of this. She left him and came to London. There we again met, as I knew we should; I befriended her, and brought her here. Now you have her story."

"Had she no relations?" queried he.

"Only a mother, who, most opportunely, had died."

"Humph!" muttered Helmore. "Confoundedly peculiar! And her name was Undine—"

"It was no such thing. Her name was a harsh one, to my ear, so I changed it."

"What was her real one, then?" he asked, eagerly.

"Gweneth, or Gwen Fane."

"By Heaven!" he ejaculated, springing up as though a bullet had pierced his brain. "Then she deceived me."

The two looked at him; but, for a second, the white passion on his features held them speechless. The actress, after that, said:

"I hope that is not addressed to me, my dear Helmore?"

"It may be addressed to both," he rejoined, recovering some self-control. "Do you know who Gweneth Fane's mother was? Who Gweneth is?"

"A riddle to us, apparently," put in Sir Evelyn. "We give it up."

"She was my wife, and Gweneth is my daughter," he said, standing looking from one to the other, as he enunciated his startling intelligence.

"Your daughter?" ejaculated the baronet.

"Your wife?" cried Kathrine.

"Yes," with a cynical laugh. "You never guessed I was married—eh? Rather too much married for me. The verdict, to be mistaken and horribly wretched for the rest of your natural life, was carried out nearly twenty years ago. We did not, however, pass our servitude long together. My ways did not please my companion of the chain. My wife left me. I was freed of a burden. She took our child with her; I did not hinder her. It would have been in my way, and an expense. My wife had a hundred a year, which I could not touch. She said if I would let her go and never again claim her as a wife, I should hear nothing more of her until death—if then. We agreed, and parted.

"I never saw her again until some months ago. I had an idea respecting my daughter's future. As my wife had had her so many years, I thought it was just I should have my turn. I started for that outlandish place—Inesscauld. I saw my wife; I stated my request. She was immensely overcome; then, pointing to the black dress she wore, said:

"'Do you not see? Had I known where to address a letter, I should have told you.'

"'Dead?' I ejaculated.

"'Dead,' she repeated, covering her face with her handkerchief. Then, suddenly raising her head, 'Markham, I am an invalid; for years I have never quitted this sofa without aid; still, if you wish me to return to you, I will come. It is very lonely now.'

"The bare idea filled me with alarm. I thought she might claim restitution of her position as my wife, and hurried off as soon as I was able. But," his long white fingers gripped, his teeth set, "I understand now; I was duped. She spoke but to frighten me with the prospect of an invalid wife fettered to my wrist, to startle me from the place before I could discover that she had deceived me—that the girl lived."

The actress broke into amused laughter.

"Poor Helmore!" she said. "Tricked by a woman—you men always are."

Sir Evelyn as yet had said nothing, but had observed Markham Helmore with attention.

"Well," he now said, "what do you purpose doing?"

"What? That's a question readily answered. I shall find

her, and bring her to brighten my solitary home," cynically. "I trust to prove her a good and obedient daughter. At any rate, she being yet under age, my will must be hers."

He looked down at Sir Evelyn as he spoke, being yet standing on the hearth-rug between the two. The baronet looked up at him. The actress, still laughing, spoke:

"As an affectionate parent, you would like to see her well married, and would not refuse a good offer?"

"Certainly not, if I found it to my own advantage."

"Look here," remarked Sir Evelyn, quietly. "This that you have discovered has put a new coloring on everything. There needs no cloak to one meaning with us three. I love Undine, or Gweneth, whichever it be. I have never felt for any woman as I feel for her. At any rate, I had resolved to make her mine. I mean to make her my wife—with your consent, of course," he added; "provided it is not too exorbitant. You shall find me a considerate son-in-law."

"Considerate," remarked Kathrine. "You'll have to study hard that original part."

"The question is," said Sir Evelyn, "how are you going to find your daughter?"

"The question is," put in the actress, "that your conversation is no longer interesting. So light your cigars, then—stand not on the order of going, but go at once."

Rising, they complied, leaving the house together. Kathrine remained a while gazing into the fire.

"A spoke has been put into your wheel, my friend Archie, through me, though not of my doing," she murmured. "If she cared for him, why, she would just run away with him, parental authority or no, to escape Sir Evelyn. I might, though, even prevent that if I could learn where Fairfax Drayton is, and give him a hint. A mysterious, anonymous letter. 'She whom you love is in peril! Save her!' What fun." And with a weary yawn she retired to bed to reflect.

Meanwhile, her two recent guests walked toward town.

"I was asking," said Sir Evelyn, "when Kathrine so summarily dismissed us, how you purposed finding your daughter. I have tried to for months. So has Kathrine. Both have failed."

"I shall succeed," remarked Helmore, "because I shall go on quite a different tack to either of you. You both have searched for her. I shall run down Melton."

"Not very difficult, that, considering we know where he is."

"The difficulty is money."

"Humph! For what purpose?"

"To take me out to the seat of war."

"Again, for what purpose? I do not see my way."

"I'll elucidate. Melton is overhead in love with the girl—she may love him."

"Possibly."

"Then to a dead certainty they correspond. Out there, trust me for waylaying or seeing Melton's letters. The postmark is enough; I need no more."

"Why not tell Melton who you are, and demand to know where she is—as a parent?"

"Bah! he would not take my word—he would imagine it a plot of Kathrine's—he would insist upon proofs—would write to the girl herself—who would naturally repeat what she has, no doubt, been taught to think—that her father is dead. Melton knows me, and he would leave no stone unturned—*not* to believe. Now, this is the question, Sir Evelyn, you must decide, because you must finance it. Shall I go?"

The baronet reflected a space, then answered:

"Yes."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAS IT TRUE?

"AND so Henry VIII. died."

"Which was a very fortunate thing for Katharine Parr."

It was a spring morning at Westwood, and in the small octagon room devoted to that purpose, Bryan was receiving his matutinal instruction from Gwen.

The latter, unconsciously following the best mode with the young—verbal teaching—had just announced the butcher king's demise, when Claude, entering, added the rider.

The companionship of these two women had been a mutual benefit. The faces that turned smilingly toward each other had a brightness almost akin to happiness; the clouds laid more lightly about their hearts.

"Forgive me," proceeded Claude. "I thought the lessons were over, and wished to say that I shall not be able to go to the town to-day. I expect some one here. I cannot leave the house to-day, so I must get you, Miss Fane, to go alone after luncheon."

"And may I go, also?" asked Bryan, eagerly.

"I shall be glad of his company if you do not consider it too far," remarked Gwen, as she put away copy-books and slate.

Claude, glancing at the boy, with that abstracted expression on the features still, answered:

"No, not this afternoon. I wish him to be at home; I may want him. As to the distance, you must take the pony chaise."

"Oh, please no!" ejaculated Gweneth, promptly. "Without you desire me back sooner, I would much prefer walking. It is so delightful, the path through the copse, now the spring flowers are showing."

"You are one of Nature's enthusiasts," smiled Claude. "Be as long as you wish. There is no necessity for you to hasten—none. You may start as soon as you please after luncheon."

Returning to the morning-room, Claude sat down, and, taking an open letter from her pocket, perused it with a perplexed, pained gravity.

"Strange!" she murmured. "A mysterious communication, yet so worded I could not refuse compliance. Refuse!" she added, turning her eyes to a watch on the table. "He has not given me time."

The abstraction returned more than once during luncheon. Gweneth could not but note it, though she felt she had no

right to make any comment. No doubt it had to do with the circumstances that had prevented Claude's going into the town as she had purposed.

On quitting the table, Gweneth at once put on her hat, and, with that exhilaration of spirits a spring day—when fine—produces, left Westwood for the town, two miles distant.

Her step was light, as, for the time, was her heart.

Nature is a kind mother. "Trust in me," she says, "and I will spread beauties and wonders before your eyes that shall soothe your pain. Throw aside 'self,' feel yourself a part of me, as I, in my bounteousness, give with open hand; so let your spirit expand toward me, and you shall not suffer, for how trivial then will become all selfish cares."

Gweneth's spirit did expand always under the influence of sunshine, fresh air, green trees, and hedge-rows.

In the copse her cares seemed to slip away. She thought but of the ferns beginning to uncurl their satiny fronds, the violets, which, like honest worth, had to be sought for, being rarer than the Lent lilies, those drops of pure gold which made an El Dorado of the mossy expanse.

The town reached at last, the commissions executed, after some unexpected delay, Gweneth started on her return.

A moment or so she hesitated as to the way she should take.

Should she keep to the road, or return as she had come? The copse, besides being the prettiest, was the shortest. Gweneth decided upon the latter, setting off at a quick pace.

She was annoyed at being late.

Half the copse had been traversed, the mist here being thicker, the heads of the golden lilies seeming to droop in sadness, when Gweneth heard some one advancing at a quick pace behind her.

Consitutionally she was not nervous, but recently there had been one or two robberies by tramps, and a momentary dread seized her. A hasty glance, however, over the shoulder, revealed sufficient of the person approaching to show he was a gentleman; hence, she proceeded without hurry.

The tread of the other evidently quickened. Was he endeavoring to overtake her? It seemed so. She would have liked much to look round, but felt that would be the very way to attract attention. Why might not this other man be in haste as she was?

Now she knew he was very near, and soon must pass—if only he would. How foolish to let her heart beat thus! Now he was on a level with her, looking at her. She knew that, though she kept her eyes bent in front.

He did *not* pass. He was keeping by her. Then she gave a great start, a low cry, and turning, looked at him.

He had spoken her name in a voice she knew.

"Gweneth Fane," he said.

"Mr. Helmore!" she ejaculated; then, that first thought springing to her mind: "You come from Kathrine Daly; she has learned where I am?"

"I do no such thing," he answered, pleasantly. "And she

does not know where you are. More than that, I am not going to tell her; though, were I to, she can no longer exert any influence upon you."

"No!" replied Gweneth, firmly. "None; I have no fear of that."

"I am certain of it," he answered, "though that was scarcely what I meant."

He was walking slowly by her side, his hands clasped behind him; and, as he spoke, she could not but notice a great change—a change for the better—in him. The cynicism had gone from his expression; his eyes seemed even kind, while in his voice was the greatest difference of all.

"Will you believe that I have come as your friend, not your enemy?" he proceeded. "But that you must when you hear what I am here to tell you."

"To tell me?" exclaimed Gweneth. Then—it was very foolish—her thoughts sprung to Fairfax Drayton.

"To tell you. Eagerly, impatiently, I have come stored with it"—he laughed, apparently with emotion—"and now don't know how to begin. You will be so surprised, it will be such a shock. I hope it will not be—repugnant."

He was leaning toward her, more meaning in his expression than in his words. Gweneth could not speak, for in her wonderment she knew not what to say. She felt a little frightened, too.

"Had I discovered what I have," he went on, "when I first saw you, you should have had no need to have fled from Kathrine's, homeless; there should have been both affection and a home to receive you."

Of course she did not understand—how could she? Her fear increased; she drew rather from him.

As if moved by sudden impulsive emotion, he put his hand gently on her arm, ejaculating in accents of entreaty:

"Do not fear me! Gweneth, listen—answer me. Did my—did your mother ever tell you her history? Did she ever tell you why she led that lonely life at Inesscauld? Did she? Did she ever speak to you of your father?"

"My father?" repeated Gweneth. What was that in his expression which made her catch her breath? "No—that is—but rarely—and that only when I was very young. I remember she wept—so I would not pain her by questions. She was a widow—my father was dead. Why else should she have wept?"

"Other things part husband and wife, unhappily," sighing, "besides death. Gweneth, your father and mother could not agree—they did not suit each other. Mind, there was no wrong on either side, only they were mistaken—they could not be happy together—so in one thing they did agree—that they should live apart."

"Why do you tell me this?" gasped Gweneth, the terror augmenting. "How do you know that this was so?"

"Can you not guess? A while ago I heard your history, and your true name—Gweneth—from Kathrine. I have found you—and, as you see, am here."

Wildly she regarded him, then covering her face, stepped back, ejaculating:

"O Heaven!"

There had rushed into her mind all that the actress had said of Marmaduke Helmore. Could this indeed be her father, the husband of her gentle, good mother? No; it was some plot to get her away from Westwood.

"It is not true—I cannot believe it!" she exclaimed.

He regarded her with an expression of deep pathos, even sorrow.

"So, then, this is the return my wife has made for my abandoning to her the care of our only child," he said, with well-acted feeling. "She promised that our little one should be taught to love the father she was not to see. Instead, all that she has learned makes her—my own flesh and blood—shrink from me in horror."

He turned, taking two paces from her, as though to conceal his emotion.

"No, no!" cried Gweneth, contritely; "she never taught me that. Do not imagine wrong of her. If I recoil—if I am amazed, incredulous even—is it strange? Think how sudden, how unexpected, all this is."

Coming back, tenderly he took her hand, saying:

"You are right, Gweneth; I will not be unjust; yet you will acknowledge 'tis hard to be so received by the child you ever loved—by the child you had been told was dead."

"Dead? I? Who told you that?"

"Your mother. Stay; listen before you say 'Impossible.' Do you recollect the eighteenth of the month before you left Inesscauld?"

Remember? Could she ever forget? The tears rushed to her eyes, her lips trembled.

"Yes. On that day my mother died suddenly. Why do you speak of it?"

"Died?" he ejaculated, genuinely startled. "How? Of what?"

She told him. Again he seemed to fight with his emotion; then, conquering it, spoke:

"Why do I speak of it? I will tell you. On that day I arrived at Inesscauld to seek you, my child."

"You?"

"I. I saw your mother lying on a couch by the window; the outer door was open. Recognizing me, she beckoned me in. I told her why I had come. She answered me, touching her black dress—that it was useless—you were dead."

"It is not true," broke in Gweneth, almost indignantly. "Never would she have said anything so false. No; it is not true."

"How am I to prove it to you?" he remarked, gloomily. "All things seem in arms against me. I cannot prove it. We two were alone together. I came, I went, as far as I know, unseen. Oh, Heaven, if my heart yearns to you, Gweneth, my child, is yours stone to me?"

He was slowly gaining influence over her; he saw it. A

sense of shame at herself, if this he said were true—of compassion for him—drooped her head upon her breast.

"Forgive me," she murmured. "I think of my position. If, indeed, I am your daughter, you cannot hold me wrong if——"

"You require proof. That you shall have; proof incontestable. And then—then, Gweneth, when you know I *am* your father, will you still shrink from me or will you come to the home I shall prepare for you, bringing brightness to my life, giving me some one to love, to live for?"

He held his hands toward her entreatingly.

Sensitive, emotional herself, she put hers in them.

"If, indeed," she said, "you are my father, your home shall be mine. I will give you a daughter's obedience, a daughter's love. I promise. Ah!" with a little sigh, "my life is very desolate and lonely. Do you not think that I shall rejoice to find once more a parent?"

He kissed her hands earnestly; then, taking a packet from his pocket, gave it to her.

"This is a sacred deposit I make with you," he said. "But in your keeping it will be safe. It contains your mother's letters to me before our marriage and after; there are other proofs besides, but surely the letters will be all-sufficient. I am staying at the railway hotel in the town. There I shall impatiently await hearing from you. Be merciful, Gweneth. Do not prolong my suspense. Farewell till then."

With a long, lingering look, he turned and hurried down the path, leaving her standing on it, the packet in her hand, gazing after him. Could he be her father? How different he had been this afternoon to when at Kathrine's; and there, even, he had never insulted her by word or look. He and her mother had parted, but there had been no wrong. If he were her father, could she refuse him the daughter's love for which he craved? No—no—twenty times no.

She spoke resolutely. Already his manner had aroused a filial yearning in her own breast for, in her loneliness, some one to love and love her.

While they had been talking the mists had come creeping up, and thickening under the trees, making objects at a distance blurred in outline. A chill damp was in the air. She must hasten on to Westwood. How eager was she to peruse the letters—her mother's! Not until night could she do this, when secure in her own room with Christie—yes, she must tell Christie, and have her opinion.

She had taken a few steps, when the sound of a voice reached her out of the mist. She recognized it as Claude's.

That Claude should be in the copse surprised her. Who could she be with? In front the trees were more sparse than where Gweneth stood, and had the horizon sky for a background; thus, even as she remained hesitating, she saw two figures come out of the gray haze toward her.

In that one second—even without the aid of his voice, which now reached her—Gweneth at once recognized the man she loved—the man who had deceived her—Fairfax Drayton.

Giddy, frightened, seized with a violent trembling, a deathly sickness, she staggered to a tree for support.

Fairfax Drayton there—with Claude? What did it mean? What portent for her? Had he also found her? Had he, too, sought her? Had he confided her wretched secret to Claude? One question pressed swiftly on the other, rendering her dizzy. Hush! He was speaking.

"We have both suffered," he was saying, "from the mad folly of the past. Good heavens! that the most solemn of rites should so often prove a curse. There was but one way in which we could hope for happiness—eternal separation."

"It was so—I own it," came Claude's low voice. "Better live apart than together in endless misery."

They stopped—either the ringing in her ears hindered Gweneth hearing, or they had lowered their voices. Then Fairfax spoke again:

"Farewell! What I can do I will do. Never again could we live together. To that I will never consent. It would be torture to both. I need not ask you to be kind to the boy."

"Kind to the boy!"

Like a flash the truth seemed to burst upon Gweneth. This mystery of Claude's husband being away—the mystery of her retired life, knowing no one—the mystery of Bryan's parentage—his likeness to Fairfax—were explained. Fate had brought her an inmate in the house of Fairfax's discarded wife—Bryan was Fairfax's son.

Unable to stand, she had dropped on her knees among the bushes. Just then, he of whom she was thinking came down the path alone, walking rapidly, his head bent.

Again he passed her by, but this time she knew she was not seen.

Claude had reached Westwood before Gweneth, who lingered behind, and stole unseen to her own room, pallid as a ghost. Scarcely was she there than she heard Christie in the passage. Opening the door, she called her, and then, the key turned, related that startling intelligence.

"Christie, he says my mother told him I was dead. It can't be true."

Then Christie felt released from her promise, and cried:

"Mees Gwen, it is true—it is. I saw him mesel', an' these were your mither's words. Ah, lassie," quoting them, she added, "ye maun na gae wi' him."

Gweneth was very white, but her voice was firmer.

"Then he is my father, and has not deceived me," she said. "Christie, I must go to him. Has he not the right to compel me? Besides, Christie, he is so changed—he is so different. And I can no longer remain here," abruptly letting her face fall on her hands, "since what I have learned to-day. Would—oh, would I could go this very night!"

"An' why, Mees Gwen?"

"Christie, Mrs. Ascelin, as she calls herself, is Fairfax Drayton's wife. The little Bryan is his son."

"What, lassie? If ye are no daft," cried Christie, "then the Lord pity us, for we maun gae indeed."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LEAVING WESTWOOD.

GWENETH had left Westwood. Once resolved, she had been eager, restless to depart, fearful that Fairfax Drayton might unexpectedly return; or, by some other unforeseen chance, Claude should discover whom she had befriended.

The more she thought over the affair, the more certain she was that her suspicion was the truth. Certainly, from what Fairfax had said in that fevered letter of wild, despairing remorse, Gwen had pictured the wife he had parted from one of a different stamp to Claude; and yet, when she took the letter from its secret hiding-place, again carefully perusing it, in many points she felt it confirmed her doubt.

He expatiated upon her refined beauty.

Beautiful, refined—was not Claude that? Once the writer spoke of her classical features. Were not Claude's such? If further proof were needed, was there not Bryan? Was there not Claude's strange preoccupation at luncheon? Was there not the meeting in the copse, when she had heard the words —sufficient in themselves as all-convincing proof—"We have each suffered from the past folly—to live together again is impossible"?

To which declaration Claude sadly had acquiesced. Then had he not added:

"There is no need for me to ask you to be kind to the boy"?

Ah, yes, there could be no doubt. If there only could be —O Heaven! if there could. But no, Christie herself, with solemn, gloomy shake of the head, confessed as much, and almost as eagerly as Gweneth desired to depart.

"It was an awfu' thing," she said, "this friendship, in ignorance, between the woman Fairfax Drayton had parted from, and her young mistress whom he had deceived."

"There is ane thing, lassie, wherein this may be gude to ye," she remarked. "Ye told me ye loved him still, but this knowledge may make ye love an' believe in him less—for ye see ye ha'e heard only his side o' the story. The leddie—his wife—who I suspect has ta'en her maiden name, may ha'e hers to tell, could ye but ask her. Look at her, my bairn—look at her wi' just een, an' can ye say there's that wrong in her that a husband should gae fra her, an' fra his bairn too? Look at her, lassie; is na there as muckle sadness in her face as in your ain? There's been sad greetin' wi' her, lassie, an', my certie, could any ane live better an' than she does noo?"

"She has her secret, as I mine," said poor Gweneth, "and

the same being is the cause. Say no more, Christie; I am convinced. I do her, his wife, wrong by remaining beneath her roof. I must go—go as soon as possible."

"An' where to, lassie?"

"Where to?" rejoined Gweneth. "You, also, then, have forgotten, as I have, the one having been obliterated by the other. In all the world there is but one place that will give me shelter, as a right—my father's."

"Your father's? Bairn, ha'e ye forgotten your mither's words?" cried Christie.

"Is it likely?" replied Gweneth, sadly. "But my dear mother"—resting her hand on the packet of letters—"loved him once——"

"He may ha'e been better then, Mees Gwen."

"Certainly, or never would she have loved him. Christie, I seem to see it all. He was of that world her pure, gentle spirit abhorred—without wrong on either side, remember that, they parted. Christie, that was not best for my father. When he came to Inesscauld, my mother deceived him, that I should not be taken from her—that would have killed her, as indeed the idea alone did. Yes, Christie, it is all bad and terrible, but is a man never to have the chance of retrieving the past? May not he be better than, when younger, he parted from mamma? He was better to-day—so changed. Is it strange that he should care for me? Ought I not to care for him? Besides all this, do you not know, Christie, he could force me to go with him, if I myself refuse—and *that* would be terrible. I am so weary—weary. I have but one wish—to leave Westwood. Oh! let us go soon—soon—soon."

Wearily indeed, and with emotion, she leaned her face down on the table.

Christie regarded her full of troubled thought, which was after this fashion:

"Was it strange that a father should wish to see his child? Seein' her, how could he help loving her? After all, in the fear of having her darling taken from her, Mrs. Fane, puir leddie, might not have been quite fair or just. An' in this new dilemma, what roof, what protection so fit as her father's?"

"We must talk more of this later," said Gweneth, rising. "I must remember that while here my time is not my own. Mrs. Ascelin may be now wondering at my absence. But one thing is decided. I must leave Westwood, and what better reason can I give than the wish to join my father?"

"Ye're reet, Mees Gwen; and I'm thinkin' that, after a', a father's hoos is the properest shelter for a lassie, an' if he didna love ye, why should he ha'e come to find ye?"

When Gweneth descended to the drawing-room, to her relief she found it yet deserted. She had made up her mind at once to tell of Marmaduke Helmore, and how her mother's letters and other inclosures had put her parentage beyond a doubt; but the discovery she had made of Fairfax Drayton's visit rendered her distressingly nervous of meeting Claude.

A letter she found on the table, and which had arrived during her absence, for a moment diverted her thoughts.

It was from Archie Melton, and she opened it eagerly, murmuring:

"My truest, best friend. Thank Heaven to see again your own handwriting!"

The last letter had been from the army surgeon. A few brief lines dictated by Archie, saying he had been slightly wounded in an encounter with the enemy. The fact being, with the true English pluck, Archie had forced his way to the front, where no correspondent need have been, and had received a grievous wound which had brought him very near death's door. Now he was convalescent, and had been imperatively ordered home.

"Well, what news? Good, I hope?" Gweneth, looking up, found Claude, who had entered unheard, standing beside her. "I knew from whom the letter was," she continued, "so placed it where at once you might see it."

"You are very good," said Gweneth. "Yes, the news is good; Mr. Melton is coming home. I am so pleased."

Claude, glancing at the speaker, fancied she guessed the reason why. But the glance had showed her more; that the features were pale, the expression nervous, anxious.

"Gweneth," she said, kindly, "what is the matter? Despite your joy at Mr. Melton's recovery, you seem to me to have something distressing you. Will you make me your confidante? Can I help you?"

She put her hand gently on the girl's arm, and regarded her with eyes full of sympathy. Gwen's lips trembled.

"How was it possible for Fairfax," she thought, "to have left such a woman? Or how she must have altered, if all he had said of her, when she was his wife, were true!"

"It is not quite distress," replied Gweneth. "But I have been startled this afternoon; something very strange has happened. I purposed at once to tell you—for—for"—hesitating—"it will necessitate my leaving Westwood."

"Leave Westwood!" ejaculated Claude, surprised. "Oh, no; I hope not. That would be bad news indeed, especially to Bryan. He loves you so. But why?"

Gweneth, at the mention of the child, trembled. If her heart had yearned to the little lad before, how much more did it do so now she knew who he really was?

"There," proceeded Claude, "here is tea. Tell me all while we are at it."

And Gweneth did.

How incompatibility of temper, difference in ideas, had brought about a separation on mutual agreement between her parents. How her father had loved society, its amusements, and while youth had been his, had enjoyed both; but now, older, his thoughts had turned to her, his daughter, whom he desired, her mother being dead, should live beneath his roof, and make a home for him—for them both.

"If there be nothing more against him than what you say," remarked Claude, gravely, a sadness in her eyes, "I

think you are right to go. No greater sorrow is there in life than the sundering of those ties which constitute home. What word in all our language is so sweet as that little monosyllable—'home'? How recklessly some destroy it! How deep is the regret when it is past—gone forever!"

She had spoken in low, impressive accents; tears swam in her eyes.

Gwen knew her thoughts were upon herself; and as she gazed at this lovely woman, so noble in bearing, so amiable of disposition, for the first time her spirit rose in revolt against Fairfax, and mentally she cried:

"The fault must have been his. There could not be all this change in her. This can be no mask, hiding the nature he described. I will not believe it. Would that past life have left no traces on this fair face, which, to look upon, is to love? Yet he, who could call it his, flies from it."

For a few moments Claude had been silent, lost in reverie. Now, abruptly rousing herself, she said:

"Forgive me. My thoughts had wandered to another home, which has been also rendered desolate, beside yours, dear. You are young, and may yet form one of your own. May it be happy, and never know sorrow. Gweneth," gently, "I think you *will* be happy, and you deserve it."

Bending forward, she kissed her on the cheek.

Poor Gwen shivered.

"If she did but know!" she thought.

"Now," proceeded Claude, "in regard, dear, to your affair. I have a plan. Your father is staying at the railway hotel, waiting your decision. And you have decided?"

"How could I do otherwise? See"—and Gweneth drew from her pocket a miniature locket.

On being opened, two miniatures were discovered in the medallions—one her mother, with the initials and date beneath, the other Marmaduke Helmore.

"Your mother had a sweet, saint-like countenance," said Claude. "Your father, too, is handsome. Fane, then, was her maiden name. No, there can be no doubt. Then I propose to send an invitation to Mr. Helmore to dine with us this evening. What do you say?"

Gweneth was for a second a trifle startled and made nervous again. She had said nothing to Claude of the character Kathrine had given Marmaduke Helmore. Yet, after all, there was nothing sinful or wrong she had charged him with. He gambled. Well, did not the highest in the land set the example? So she answered:

"It is very generous of you—thank you. I should like you to see Mr. Helmore. I should value your opinion."

So a groom was dispatched with the invitation, bringing back for answer that Mr. Marmaduke Helmore would be delighted to accept it.

About a quarter of an hour before dinner he was announced. Claude was at once struck by his appearance. He was handsome, while his bearing was that of one well-bred and accustomed to society.

Never did Marmaduke Helmore so lay himself out to reap golden opinions, rarely had he so well succeeded. There was an apologetic tone, an implied confession and repentance in his voice when occasionally he referred to the past, while he did not conceal the joy he declared he promised himself in the society of his daughter, "his guardian angel that was to be."

Often Gweneth was touched, especially when, alone together in the drawing-room a while, he referred to his wife and his love for her, growing emotional thereupon. His respect had, he declared, never died. Gweneth no longer shrunk from the kiss he gave her on his departure.

On the contrary, as she felt his arm about her waist, as she leaned against his shoulder, a feeling of having obtained sure anchorage at last in a peaceful haven, came over her, and she returned the kiss he gave.

During the evening the future had been arranged. Until Helmore could form a home in London they would take a trip to Scotland.

Gweneth's heart had leaped at the prospect of once again beholding the wild, grand sweep of the moors, the mighty crags, and purple heather. There was a shooting-box there which a friend of his always placed at his disposal when that friend was not himself using it.

"There, my little Gwen," he smiled, "we will begin our new home. There you shall commence the rôle of my housekeeper."

And Gwen had smiled up at him and the prospect more gayly than she had smiled for many a long day.

"My dear," had said Claude, when the two parted for the night, "I think you will be very happy. I am so—so pleased it is so."

"I think so, too. Yet I shall grieve to leave Westwood. You have been so kind, and I so happy."

Long Gweneth lay awake, once stealing into little Bryan's room, lying down by the child, clasping him in her arms, aware her greatest sorrow would be the leaving him.

Three days later she was *en route* for Scotland with her father and Christie, whose doubts had all fled at the prospect of returning to the

Land of wild moor and darkling glen.

Gweneth, in all the hurry, had sent a letter to Archie Melton, to be delivered to him on his journey home.

Eagerly, with amazement, he had read it, then had ejaculated:

"I don't believe it! It's a plot, a trap!"

"'We go to Glashiels Lodge, Argyle,'" he read out of the letter.

"Glashiels Lodge! Does she know—no, she cannot—that Glashiels Lodge, in one of the wildest parts of the Highlands, belongs to Sir Evelyn Lynton?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN ARRIVAL.

GWENETH was once again happy—that is, her feeling was as near akin to happiness as under the present conditions it could be. Her whole being seemed to expand as once more she beheld the wild moors, the picturesque glens, that had never been solitary, desolate to her, and felt the sharp, invigorating breeze upon her cheek, which glowed beneath its kiss, while her eyes sparkled like hoar-frost in moonlight.

The journey thither had been a pleasant one. Marmaduke Helmore had proved paternally attentive, affectionate, and considerate. Gweneth could not but reciprocate this in a measure. Indeed, it was so nice to have some one to care for you like this—to love, and not to be ashamed of loving.

One thing was evident, and the idea grew hourly stronger, that Marmaduke Helmore must much have changed in these many years, or surely no woman would have had grave cause to separate from him.

Another reason for her growing partiality, which she fostered as the seed from whence the affection she ought to feel should spring, was the kind terms, almost love, with which he spoke of her mother.

Never once did he utter a word of blame or complaint. He seemed desirous to make out that was all his, and to be repentant, yet with a subtle, almost imperceptible, but existing under-current, that implied the fault had certainly not been on his side, only he was nobly willing to let it appear so, rather than seek to clear himself at the expense of Gweneth's love for the parent who had been all in all to her.

"But she should not have told me you were dead, Gwen," he remarked, with gentle reproach, as they had sat alone in the railway carriage bearing them north. "It was hard to give you up—our only child—entirely; but, for her sake, I did so, yet she begrudged me even looking upon your face."

He was holding Gweneth's hand fondly in both his as they sat side by side. She returned his pressure as she said:

"It seems strange she should have done so. She must have feared the losing me; indeed, I know that was what frightened her into the untruth. We were all in all to each other. She loved me very dearly."

"Who could have failed doing so, my darling?" answered Helmore, fondly regarding her. "She was right. Had I seen you, I could not again have parted from you."

"Papa," softly, "let the dead past bury the remembrance."

"Content," he smiled, "since you are mine."

From Glasgow they steamed up the Clyde, then in a dog-cart drove over heath and moor, which grew wilder and more desolate every mile they advanced, yet was not so to Gweneth, nor to Christie, who loved this land like the air she breathed.

In a gray Highland mist they reached Glashiels, a commodious shooting-lodge standing alone, within hail of extensive deer forests. It was in charge of a gillie, who had kindled roaring fires in welcome. The light glinted on the window-panes, and glowed warm out at the open door, where two beautiful collies stood, ready to do the honors of the place.

"Ah!" cried Gweneth, her cheeks rich with mountain roses, as, with Christie and the collies, she entered the sitting-room where dinner was ready laid, "this indeed looks like home. Eh, Christie? Here will we renew something of the dear, dear old days, and be happy once again."

Kneeling on the hearth-rug, she extended her hands to the blaze, and made friends with the collies. Outside, Helmore was taking sundry packages from the cart, while the gillie stood at the horse's head, his torch trailing a fiery serpent, ending in black smoke, through the mist.

"Now take it to the stable, Donald," said Helmore; "then let us dine."

As he approached the door, his eyes beheld through the casement Gweneth and her companions on the rug in the red, ruddy glow of the fire. The picture arrested him.

"By Jove! Sir Evelyn's right," he thought. "There *is* a charm about her rarely met with nowadays—this period of high education and self-esteem. If he could but see her now, the future Lady Evelyn Lynton."

The evening that followed was a pleasant one to both father and daughter. To Gweneth, her troubles were over; she was growing accustomed to her father, and beginning to like him, while domesticity was new to Marmaduke Helmore, and its originality pleased him for a space. Besides, it would have been strange indeed had he not felt some affection for, and much pride in, a daughter such as Gweneth—especially as in her he saw the making of both their fortunes.

Sir Evelyn was wealthy; there was no doubt that he was desperately in love—therefore could not be other than generous to him. In truth, Helmore had his own plans that he should be. Never once did he consider Gweneth herself; he regretted what had taken place between her and the baronet, but that could be explained and condoned—at any rate, she owed him filial obedience, and he intended to exact it.

Poor Gweneth! As she chatted and laughed, thinking the best she could of her parent, and trying to think still better, she never suspected the dangerous animal crouching, and waiting to spring, that lurked behind that well-looking mask.

They separated early. Gweneth was tired from her journey, and she was desirous to be up early, to be out among the heather once again.

In her own room, throwing wide the casement, she looked forth. The mists had partly been dispersed by the moon,

which, when the dark masses of drifting cloud did not obscure her face, inundated moor and glen with her weird light.

Gwen's very soul thrilled as she gazed; no longer did she seem of this earth, but, in spirit, lifted above it, and absorbed in that One which had made things so beautiful.

But suddenly, a black cloud shutting out the moonlight, something in the night, recalled that whereon she had beheld the ship drifting to destruction—the ship in which Fairfax Drayton was a passenger.

In a moment's space she recalled the events that had arisen from that one circumstance, and bowing her head, murmured:

"That was my fortune which came over the sea. Heaven forgive him; it was a sad one indeed!"

Meanwhile, Marmaduke Helmore, lighting his pipe, had taken pen, and was writing the following letter:

DEAR SIR EVELYN:—By the above address you will see I have been able to accept your generous offer, which put Glashiels at my service, at a far earlier date than I had imagined likely.

We arrived here about two hours ago, in a Scotch mist, which, proverbially, wets an Englishman to the skin. My daughter, who has been reared among such scenes, and is, as it were, to the climate born, found beauties even in that, which my more Southern taste failed to.

Then, perhaps, even as to the pure all things are pure—possibly to the beautiful all things, even a Highland mist, may be beautiful; and my child is *very* beautiful. Beautiful in her high-minded spirit, her gentle trust, her innocence.

Do not smile, but as I gazed upon her, seated awhile back at dinner, as on retiring, I felt her *kiss* upon my cheek, there was something in my heart's inner depths that was strangely stirred; a something I own never before to have experienced. For the first time I understood the meaning of "parental affection."

As I watched her graceful figure go from the room—as I met her clear, sparkling eyes smiling back at me, as I heard her musical voice and laughter in the room above, I was conscious of a great pride at the knowledge that this sweet, virtuous girl was my very own, my daughter.

By some freak trick our thoughts often serve us, that fellow Fairfax Drayton rose to my recollection, and the cruel wrong he had nearly succeeded, but for Kathrine, in doing her; and my face flushed, my hands gripped with a passion that might have proved dangerous to the scoundrel had his evil fortune caused him to cross my path at the moment.

Pardon me running on in this fashion. How you must laugh, knowing the cynical man of the world who writes it! How, a few days ago, I should have laughed myself! I can't now. Blood, they say, is thicker than water. I should rather say there is some electric or mesmeric force between parent and child when in contact, that awakens sensations which, despite their power, lie dormant until the contact occurs.

Here, in a few words, let me condense the whole. Gweneth has struck a chord in my heart, the existence of which I never dreamed. I am proud of her—I love her. *Voilà tout.*

When shall we see you? You promised an early visit. Leave it to me to win for you a pleasant reception.

Faithfully yours,

M. HELMORE.

Inclosing and directing it, the writer drew his chair to the fire, and, yet smoking, fell into a reverie, his gaze, with no little satisfaction, fixed on the glowing logs.

"This is a game in which I don't imagine there's much

risk—only a little skillful manipulation required," he mused, smiling. "And, well, yes, it is a satisfaction that, for once at least, I can score on the side of virtue. Sir Evelyn is in love up to the hilt. The game lies clear before me. My terms will be, my daughter made Lady Evelyn, and a small annuity settled on her affectionate father. He'll understand that; the letter will not deceive *him.*"

The letter did not deceive the baronet. Perusing it at his club, he read very clearly between the lines. He saw that Marmaduke Helmore had his price—that he was ready to sell Gweneth to the man who loved her—though she should abhor him. No "parental affection" would intrude itself there. Only one of the terms of purchase would be—marriage.

Was that what Sir Evelyn wanted?

Now the moment to decide had come, he hesitated. Let him play his little game, too. Let him hold in check the feverish impatience to proceed at once to Glashiels. A semblance of coolness, on his part, might frighten Marmaduke Helmore into being somewhat more amenable.

The baronet did not know his mind; but his man knew him.

For three days, exerting violent self-control over his inclination. Sir Evelyn wandered restlessly about town. Then, dispatching a telegram to Helmore, prepared to start for Glashiels.

The time was passing very delightfully to Gweneth, and apparently so to her father, who, however, was secretly intensely bored, and beginning to find the place unbearable. He got up late and retired late, for when the house was still, he tried to knock out, by calculation, "a system that must infallibly break the bank at Monte Carlo," when next he visited that place.

With Gweneth and old Christie it was different. Their delight was real. The former had already become proud of her housekeeping duties. After them she and her father would take long walks across the moors.

Sometimes, ere he arose, she would go alone, finding that companionship in Nature which prevented any feeling of loneliness.

One afternoon she had gone further than she had intended; the mists, too, had come down, making her uncertain of the way. Finally the lodge came in sight, and, relieved, with quicker pace she hastened toward it.

At the door stood Helmore. He had seen her approach, and came out.

"Did you think I was lost?" she smiled. "Were you frightened?"

"I was frightened," he replied, putting his arm about her. "You must not terrify me so again, darling. In a moment I should have started in search."

"Poor papa! I am so sorry, but—"

"Never mind, since you are safe, Gweneth," he interrupted. "I have news for you; a guest has arrived."

"A guest?" she repeated.

Could it be Archie Melton?

"One whom you misunderstood, and who, not unnaturally, misunderstood you. But all that can be explained. Suffice it, he is my friend."

"Who is it, papa?" queried Gweneth, instinctively recoiling.

"Sir Evelyn."

"Sir Evelyn!" she cried. "Here! Papa, I cannot see him; you would not wish me to."

"On the contrary, I do wish you to; and, as my daughter, to receive him with a welcome, darling, due to your father's guest."

"Papa, you cannot know," indignantly.

"I know everything. There," drawing her arm through his and walking up and down, "no one is more sorry for what occurred than the baronet himself. Do you remember what young Melton believed on meeting you beneath Kathrine Daly's roof? Was it surprising that Sir Evelyn should hold you, her friend, as little worthy of respect as she was herself? Had he met you in honorable company, he would have never given you cause for offense. Can you not understand this? The society you were among condemned you."

He paused, then proceeded:

"I repeat, no one more deeply deplores what occurred than Sir Evelyn himself. As a proof, he has undertaken this long journey to apologize to me; to—if you will permit him—earnestly apologize to you."

Still Gwen did not speak; but he felt her shrink.

"I have told him," he continued, "there is no need—that is, that it will be wisest to let the past be forgotten, as if it had never occurred, and that you should meet now as if for the first time. Gweneth, is not what I have said just?"

"Yes," she answered; "I confess it."

"Then remember he has come here as my guest. As my daughter will you not receive him? You will not find him the same Sir Evelyn you knew at Kathrine's."

"Yes, papa, I will," said Gwen, feeling she could not refuse.

They entered the house and the room where the baronet impatiently sat.

"Sir Evelyn, my daughter, Gweneth Helmore."

And once more Gwen's fingers were clasped by him whom she so loathed, yet who, at no distant day, was to call her—wife.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PREPARING THE TRAP.

GWENETH was the reverse of pleased when, during the evening which followed Sir Evelyn's arrival, she learned that not only was he going to stay at Glashiels the night, but for some days; indeed, the length of his visit was indefinite. Nevertheless, she could not but confess to herself that had this been the commencement of their acquaintance, she would have had no cause to dislike nor shrink from him.

Complying with Marmaduke Helmore's suggestion, he made no reference to Gweneth of the past. In fact, he acted as if this were their first meeting; still, his exceeding deference of manner toward her was so courteous, so much that of a well-bred gentleman, that she could not but feel every move, every glance, every word, an implied apology for his behavior beneath Kathrine's roof.

Gweneth was of too just and forgiving a nature not to recognize this and appreciate it; yet nothing could obliterate from her memory the man Sir Evelyn could be; and in her heart there remained an antipathy she could not conquer.

"Papa," she said, the following morning, as they stood at the window of the lodge sitting-room, waiting for the baronet to put in an appearance, "why does Sir Evelyn stay here? Why does he not go?"

"Well, I suppose, my love, because he would rather remain, eh?"

"He should not 'rather,'" retorted Gweneth, drawing her brows. "He is a gentleman—I see that now—therefore he must be aware his presence cannot be agreeable to me. Besides, he should not stay without being asked, and surely, papa, aware of the man he can be, you would not ask him? You cannot hold him as a welcome guest?"

"Why not?" said her father, promptly. "My dear child, your residence at Inesscauld has made you at your age as innocent of the world, and the ways of its people, as a baby. Every man has two sides to his character."

"Oh, papa!"

"It is true. We are, I regret to say, not saints in society, Gwen. We enjoy ourselves. But even in our amusements our best natures are with us; if for a moment dormant, they are so *only* for a moment. And, mark me, dear, it's the worst portion of your sex who is answerable for the sins of ours. It was a Frenchman who knew the world, who said, '*Cherchez la femme.*' It was Kathrine and her society who made Sir Evelyn as you saw him then. It is the knowledge, dear, of your purity and virtue that makes him what he is

now—very much ashamed of himself—for so he has told me—as of the past. In truth, Sir Evelyn is a thorough good fellow—all women like him—and *entre nous* the girl will be confoundedly envied and will esteem it a mighty good thing who catches him for a husband."

Gweneth could not have told why she started, then with a faint smile said:

"Possibly. I don't think *I* should envy her."

"That would arise from your folly, and, as I said, your ignorance of the world," responded Helmore, rather curtly. "Listen, Gwen, and in this be guided by me, dear. I am going to take you into my confidence."

He drew her hand through his arm, and began stroking it fondly.

"My fight has been a hard, a very hard one, and more than once I should have gone under but for the noble, generous friendship of Sir Evelyn. In my bitter straits he, and only he, has held me a helping hand and pulled me back on to my feet. Would it not be base in me to be ungrateful?"

"Indeed, yes!" ejaculated Gweneth, warmly. "I did not know this."

"Of course you did not, darling. But now you do, you will not wonder that I ask you, as my daughter, to try to like—rather, let me say, to appreciate the sterling qualities of Sir Evelyn."

Whether it was the well-acted pathos, the suppressed emotion in the speaker's tones, or the mesmeric influence of that soft stroking of the hand, but Gweneth felt really touched, and she answered:

"Papa, I will try—indeed, I will."

"Heaven bless you, darling!" and with something that looked like tears in his eyes, Helmore drew her to him and kissed her.

Let it be remembered that Gweneth had been reared with women, no man had ever pressed her lips thus, and at the contact of her father's lips a well-spring of filial affection burst forth in her heart, drawing her with bands of love and duty to this new-found parent; and again she said, more earnestly:

"I will try, papa. Indeed I will. It would have been so easy had I never met him at Kathrine's."

"There—there—there! Let us, dear, forget that terrible period; and now I have something else to tell you. Yes, Gwen, you are the only being I have in the world to love. There shall be nothing secret or underhand between us. You call Sir Evelyn my guest; on the contrary, I am his."

"You, papa?"

"Exactly. On learning the discovery I had made, the desire I had to go somewhere with my new-found daughter, where I could be quiet, the baronet said, promptly, 'My dear fellow, there's Glashiels quite at your service. Take it. Not a word of thanks. You may as well use it, as to let it remain empty, while it will save you expense—your purse is not of the longest, I know. He has cause. I could not refuse,

Gwen. I had, I confess, no desire, for previously to this he had sent me a letter expressive of an honorable man's sorrow for what had taken place at Kathrine's, and offering the sincerest apology. You cannot then fail, darling, to judge its writer more leniently than you do now."

He felt for his pocket-book, and looked through the papers it contained, without—as he knew would be—success. Meanwhile, Gweneth had said earnestly:

"Trust me, papa, I will not be unjust. All this you say must make me see Sir Evelyn in a different light than I have yet regarded him. Indeed, neither you nor he shall have cause to complain of me henceforth."

"My darling, I knew you would feel thus, yet was idiot enough to hesitate to confide in you."

He kissed her again with even more effusion, then drew a little away, exclaiming:

"Hush! here he comes. He must not hear us talking of him."

Gweneth, who was not likely to mistrust her father, having seen but the favorable side he chose to present to her, had spoken correctly when saying what she had heard would and did make her see Sir Evelyn in a very different light.

As was natural in an innocent and just disposition, she began now rather to exaggerate the baronet's good qualities, to excuse the evil in him she knew and to force herself, even with success, to applaud the good she believed.

After all, to do so was not so very difficult. Sir Evelyn was no longer the Sir Evelyn of the actress's salon. His love for Gweneth increased every hour he was in her presence, and genuinely, with all truth, he was laying himself out to please. His compliments were implied rather than uttered. His attention was full of courtesy and respect. He skillfully ascertained her wishes, to fulfill them with courtly deference.

Aware of her enthusiastic affection for the wild Highland scenery, he, too, became an enthusiast, and on this vantage ground of apparent unanimity of feeling, won greatly on Gweneth. Apparent—for in the grandeur around the baronet saw but an expanse to slaughter the lower animals, to whom God had given life even as unto himself. While he regarded with perfect indifference the fact that cotters might starve, and be forced from their homes in order that he, and those akin, might not be debarred of their thirst for slaughter.

"Sir Evelyn," said Helmore, when, after the breakfast, they were alone together, "I must trouble you to write me a letter upon the lines I will dictate. I have told Gweneth it is already written, and have promised to show it to her."

"A letter upon what subject?" was the query.

Helmore explained, adding, with a laugh:

"You perceive, while you sleep, I am at work in your interest."

"And your own," was the rejoinder.

"My dear Sir Evelyn," with a careless shrug, "a man must live. I like my daughter; but children are too expensive luxuries for the poor. Still, if, having seen more of the girl,

your affection begins to wane, she is beautiful enough soon to find another suitor in London."

"Don't be a fool! Well, if you like it better, let neither of us be fools," remarked the baronet. "We are both too much men of the world to waste time in the futile attempt of deceiving each other. I'll write the letter. Honestly, what is your real opinion respecting the feeling she entertains toward me now?"

"Most favorable. I have read her disposition thoroughly, and have discovered how to influence it. Your suggestion to keep her down at this wild place, far from London and civilization, was wise. There is no influence here to counteract mine. Do not fear; before she quits Glashiels she will be, or will have promised to be, your wife."

"Would it were to-morrow," put in the baronet, fervently.

"What!" laughed Helmore, "is your passion so desperate?"

"You may laugh; I do not care," was the response. "Every day I am more impatient for the hour when I may speak."

"I do not think it far distant," said Helmore. "Give me the letter, and do not doubt she shall be yours; but if matters can be arranged without the assertion of my parental authority, it will be better for the happiness of both."

So, after all, this coming to Glashiels had been a plot, a trap, into which Gweneth had stepped in ignorance, believing in the affection of this new father. Ah! it is so wretched to have no kin! It is so pleasant to own some one to love! What wonder such a nature as Gweneth's felt this, and trusted Helmore's so pathetically expressed affection? For his sake she looked upon Sir Evelyn, after that conversation, with different eyes; and, in truth, began to like him, out of very gratitude, for the friend he had been to her father.

Above another week passed, yet Sir Evelyn remained at Glashiels, secretly growing impatient at delay.

They rode, they walked together—that is, the three, for Gweneth yet, despite the change in her opinion, managed to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with the baronet.

One morning Helmore, at breakfast, proposed a walk in a certain direction."

"It is a long distance," said Gweneth; "and there is, I fear, sure indications of coming mist."

"I thought," smiled her father, "that, a daughter of the mists, you had no fear, Gwen?"

"Neither have I," she answered, laughing. "I merely spoke to show my weather wisdom. The morning now is beautiful. Why should we lose it?"

"Wherever Miss Helmore leads, I follow," put in Sir Evelyn.

"Then," she smiled, "it will be to the hills."

That day Gweneth felt in more than usually good spirits, and never had the baronet been more agreeable or more in love. He could not remove his eyes from the girl's lithe, graceful figure, as she moved through the heather, or, with rose-flushed cheek and sparkling eyes, breasted the hills.

It was on one of those hills, when they had nearly reached the crest, that the mist came down with a suddenness almost to surprise them. In a few seconds the landscape on either side was shut out from view by a gray, impenetrable veil.

"By Jove! we are in for it!" said Helmore. "To retreat is impossible. Those yawning chasms we passed, one might topple into in such a mist."

"To retreat at present we cannot," remarked Sir Evelyn. "But to remain here is impossible. Miss Helmore must have some shelter!"

"Shelter!" smiled Gwen. "Where could it be found here?"

"If I know the dangers of these hills," laughed the baronet, "I also know other things respecting them. Not far off is a shepherd's shieling, which will offer some protection against the mist. Helmore, keep close; do not let us lose one another. Miss Gweneth, I must take care of you."

Without waiting consent, he drew her hand under his arm, and immediately struck across the hill at an angle.

The action had been done so kindly, that Gweneth resisted the first impulse to draw away.

Sir Evelyn proceeded with an assurance that proved his knowledge of the path he took, and before they had gone a hundred yards they reached a small tumble-down shieling. Furniture it possessed none, save an old backless chair. In the corner, however, was a heap of wood.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Sir Evelyn. "At least we can procure light and warmth. Helmore, lend a hand."

Soon the three were busy, Gweneth laughing joyously at the fun. The fire was kindled, driving the mist from the hut. Gwen extended her hand to the blaze with the gleefulness of a child.

"We can defy the weather, can we not?" she said, gayly, as Sir Evelyn entered. "Where is papa?"

"He will be here soon," smiled the baronet. "He declares this mist has sent a dangerous chill to his innermost system, and ascertaining that, about two hundred yards higher up, there used to be a bothy where whisky was obtainable, he has gone to explore."

"But," cried Gweneth, alarmed, "he may get lost."

"Not he, Miss Helmore; the path, though narrow, is clear enough."

"Then why should we not all have gone?"

"First, because the bothy may now be deserted, and Helmore will only have his trouble for his pains; secondly, if the illicit distillers are there, they are not of a kind that you could sit in their company; thirdly," he had approached a little nearer to where she sat, and was looking down upon her, "thirdly"—his tone lower, more impressive—"I wanted him to go, I wanted this *tête-à-tête*. Oh, yes, you must forgive me; but I have craved for this moment—hungered for it, being unable to keep silent longer. Gweneth, my darling, I love you—I want you to be my wife."

Suddenly he had knelt down before her, taking her clasped hands in his as they rested on her lap.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SEARCH ON THE HILLS.

THE action had been so sudden, that for a space Gweneth did not realize his meaning, but sat gazing into the face raised to hers, the light of the fire illumining both.

It was but for a space; then terror seized her, she started from her seat, plucking her hands from his. She was met by a slight resistance. Sir Evelyn remained kneeling, an expression of poignant distress on his features.

"What!" he said; "will nothing obliterate the past? Have you thrust me so far beyond the pale of even respect, that what is esteemed as a compliment from the lips of any other man is an insult from mine?"

His tone, his manner, somewhat calmed her.

"Sir Evelyn," she exclaimed, "you should not have said this; indeed, you should not. It is unfair; it is not honorable to thus take advantage of my position."

He arose quickly, pain on his countenance, in his voice.

"It is you who are unfair, unjust now, Miss Helmore," he remarked. "For the first time, I find myself alone in your presence, and my heart forces my lips to speak. I love you! Will you not let me say even that? Surely my love is as honorable as it is sincere. Will you not believe me when I say no one regrets that wretched past more than I? Am I unworthy even of credence?"

"No, indeed," said Gweneth, tremulously. "I do believe you. I understand that you have been trying to show this. I do forgive the past. I have tried to forget it. You have been very kind—kind, Sir Evelyn, to my father, to me; only please"—and she bent her eyes, full of pleading, not unmingled with pity, upon him—"do not ask this of me, for it is impossible."

"Impossible?" he repeated, huskily; then, as moved by sudden agony, covered his face with his hands, remaining a while silent.

Gweneth was touched, yet she was frightened, too, and anxiously turned her eyes to the entrance of the shieling, hopeful to see her father. But the white, gray mist, met her gaze. Why did he not return? Why was he so long away?

Sir Evelyn's voice broke the silence.

"Do you know that you destroy all hope of happiness in this life for me, forever, Gweneth, by that word impossible?" he said, with emotion. "I have entreated you to forget the past, and yet that past created in me the love I now most humbly place at your feet. Your sweet purity amid that vicious society stirred my soul to its inner depths. I, mis-

trustful of women, saw in you what woman could be. I, who had resolved never to wed, never to put my happiness, my honor, at the mercy of a woman, knew I had found one, a pearl, who, could I but win her, would hold her husband's happiness, his honor as sacred as her own. Gweneth, at Kathrine's I beheld you through the medium of your surroundings. When I knew the truth, my soul knelt, metaphorically, as I now do, at your feet—as before the altar of a saint."

Very different language all this to that used in the actress's drawing-room. And so far it was genuine.

Sir Evelyn loved and desired her for—nay, had determined she should be—his wife. That her heart was not his, he was aware, hence, was acting the part he deemed, or Helmore deemed, the most likely to win, at least, consent.

"Girls brought up as she has been," had philosophically remarked the latter, "are ever full of sentiment and romance. You may win that from her compassion you may never hope to get from her love."

Even now, Sir Evelyn felt his prompter's remark was true, for, as he once more possessed himself of Gweneth's hand, she did not withdraw it, while her countenance betrayed distress, and the fire glittered on tears in the eyes with which she regarded him.

"Sir Evelyn, I am very, very sorry," she murmured. "But you know my history. I have no love to give to you, or to any man—and without that I could be no wife."

"Be merciful, Gweneth," he entreated. "That love to which you refer, I know to be impossible; but, since you can bestow it on no other man, then will I be content with a colder affection, if but I can call you mine; if I may have the right of loving you, Gweneth, every hour of my life shall be devoted to your happiness; a smile from you, a hand clasped in friendship, sufficient reward. Oh, dearest," he cried, more passionately, "for mercy's sake do not answer me now; take time to reflect. My love, my wealth, I give you, dear. I ask so little in exchange, but that little is more than all the world beyond has power to bestow. Give me at least hope, Gweneth. Give me hope. If—if you deny me that, then do you deprive me of life; then do you kill me."

He pressed his lips to her hand, and Gweneth, all dazed and bewildered, shocked at this power she possessed, and pitying, stood looking down, too agitated to speak.

At that moment the past was all forgotten, or at least condoned. At that moment so tender was her compassion, that there and then she might have yielded, had she loved Fairfax Drayton a little, little less.

But the very passion of Sir Evelyn's words, the glowing glances from his eyes, were, indeed, kindling a similar passion in her bosom; but it was for the only man she had ever and could ever love.

This being so, her spirit revolted from being wife to another, even though that other exacted no greater return than friendship. Ten years older, Gweneth might have fancied

such a union the more likely to produce content, happiness. Now, in the full flower of youth, when love feels indeed a sacred gift from Heaven, she held its assumption a sacrilege.

"What can I say but what I have?" she answered, almost in a whisper, tears in her eyes. "If I could do differently I would, for your sake, but for your sake it would be crueller than for my own. Papa and I will go away, then easily you will forget me."

"Forget you?" cried Sir Evelyn. "Gweneth, do you know what love is, and say that? I tell you, without hope I cannot live. That refusing me, you refuse me life."

More passionately yet he pleaded. He bowed himself to the ground before her. He held her dress, kissing its folds. The torrent of his passion bewildered the girl. *Why* did not her father return? Her brain was dazed. Sudden flashes of weakness, of fear, of languor rushed over her; the words he uttered grew confused, indistinct."

"Papa!" she cried—"papa, oh, come." Then: "Pray let me sit down."

She moved as one blind toward the chair, but Sir Evelyn, springing to his feet, was only in time to catch her in his arms before she fell forward insensible. Close to his heart he held her, gazing into her still, white face resting against his breast, every nerve in his frame quivering, his pulse throbbing. How he loved her! All round the shieling was still the gray, impenetrable mist, making the fire brighter as it lighted the interior, and the two, its only occupants.

"My darling—my beautiful Gweneth!" exclaimed the baronet, as he kissed her brow. Almost instantly Helmore appeared, coming out of the mist at the door.

"What is it? What has happened?" he said, advancing. "I heard your voices cease."

Sir Evelyn explained. While he did so, Marmaduke Helmore took Gweneth from him.

"She has refused you," was the calm rejoinder. "I knew as much, but you have made great way—yes, I was near enough most of the time to hear what passed. Now please, Sir Evelyn, go. This is but vertigo—she is already recovering; you had better not be here when she comes to herself."

The baronet appeared on the point of expostulating.

"Have you not promised to leave the affair to me?" ejaculated Helmore, in a low tone. "And have not I promised before a week she shall be your wife? Go!"

Without a word, Sir Evelyn obeyed.

Scarcely had he done so than, after a long-drawn sigh, Gweneth opened her eyes, drew herself rather more erect, and looked around.

"Oh, it is you, papa!" she exclaimed, with infinite relief. "Where—where is Sir Evelyn?"

"Gone. What have you done or said to him, dear? He came flying past me through the mist like a man distraught. I might have taken him for his ghost."

Gweneth covered her face.

"Oh, I am so—so sorry!" she murmured. "But I could not help it."

"Help what?" asked Helmore, in apparent ignorance. "There, sit down, and tell me how you frightened him. We cannot leave till the mist lifts."

Gweneth related what had occurred, expressing sorrow for Sir Evelyn's pain and disappointment. Helmore looked gravely into the fire, which he had replenished with wood.

"I'm confoundedly sorry, Gweneth, you have refused him," he said. "I am poor—he is wealthy. Such a union would have been excellent for both. You can't mistrust his love for you."

"Indeed, no," she answered. "I should regret this less if I did."

"I knew he loved you. You don't know what comfort and luxury are. Sir Evelyn can give you both. You say you can never love again. Well, Sir Evelyn would be content with all you could give, child"; he put his hand on her knee. "I'm not going to press or hurry you into saying yes; but do think over it—for my sake. It is hard to be poor when one gets old. Sir Evelyn, if refused, is not likely still to befriend me. Heaven knows but he may want back all the money he has lent," gloomily. "If he does, I couldn't pay a quarter, so he'll have to shut me up in lieu of it."

"Papa!" ejaculated Gweneth, in horror.

Helmore in a second changed his manner, speaking with an off-hand carelessness.

"There, let us say no more about it," he remarked. "At least, not at present. What right have I to ask you to sacrifice your happiness to save me from anxiety—penury? Though, Gwen, you might be happy with a man who loves you as he does. But," rising up, "we'll say no more. See, the mist is clearing. It is rolling down the hill like smoke. Come, darling; if you feel strong enough, we will follow it."

Gweneth at once rose. For a moment she did not speak. Helmore, indeed, had read her nature truly. His sorrow, his need, his disappointment, so resignedly expressed, yet his tenderness to herself, could not but affect her, as it was intended to do. When he drew her arm beneath his, her hand pressing his hand, she murmured, contritely:

"Papa, I am *so* grieved. If I could say yes—if I only *could* —I would, for your sake."

"I know it, darling, but I suppose it can't be. There, don't look so downcast. After all, if I must face penury in the future, I shall have you, Gwen, by my side to comfort me; and when all is said and done, when one is poor, death comes as a welcome guest, not as an enemy. There is an advantage in that, isn't there, eh?"

He laughed as he ended, and when Gweneth, feeling guilty, and as though she had been very selfish, and cruelly negligent of him, would have spoken further, he stayed her, and persisted in changing the subject—in a way, however, that caused her to think of it still more, with the sense of guilt and selfishness augmented.

The mists were rolling from the hills as rapidly as they had descended, and Helmore with Gweneth had no difficulty in following the downward path. Now and again the latter looked around for signs of Sir Evelyn, but perceived none. She was anxious, compassionating, yet shrunk nervously from the thought of meeting him again.

Reaching the lodge, where also there was no sign of the baronet, she hurried to her own room, and breathing more freely, sat down to arrange her ideas and to think. The predominant feeling possessing her was sorrow for Sir Evelyn, next came sorrow for her father; she could not fail to see how beneficial such a marriage would have been for him.

"And, after all, what do I surrender?" she murmured, wearily. "Ah! it is easy for those to be generous who have no hope in the future for themselves."

She yet sat pondering, when Helmore knocked at her door. Instantly she opened it. He stood outside, his expression anxious, perturbed.

"What is the matter, papa?" she asked.

"Nothing, I trust," he answered; "but I am getting uneasy about Sir Evelyn. I can obtain no news of him. My idea was that, not wishing to distress you or himself with another meeting, he had gone, returning south."

"Has he not?" she asked, eagerly.

"No; I have ascertained that easily. A man, certainly not Sir Evelyn, would not walk over these moors to the posting town. Besides, why should he, when his horse, also the cart, are in the stable?"

"Oh! papa, what do you think—what"—tremulously—"do you fear?"

"I *dare* not think," he rejoined. "But Donald is getting ready; we are going back to the hills to search."

"Papa," she put her hand on his arm, "you *do* fear something—tell me. Is it possible *I* am the cause?"

"You must not think that, dear," he put in, hastily; "that would be oversensitiveness. But I fear in his bitter disappointment he has rushed recklessly through the mist, and fallen into some chasm or over some steep hill-side."

"Oh!" cried Gweneth, covering her face, "he may be dead."

"No, no; hurt only, I pray; but he may be in sore need of help, so we are going in search."

Gweneth wished to accompany them, but Helmore would not permit it; so, pale, sick at heart with anxiety, and something like remorse, she watched the two go, Donald carrying an unlighted torch and a coil of rope over his shoulder, suggestive of the danger there might be, and the length of time their search might last.

Hour after hour Gweneth waited for their return in vain; at times she would go some distance across the moors, or to some high ground, hopeful to catch sight of them.

But no. When darkness fell she could not do that, but had to sit or pace the room waiting. At last there were footsteps outside. Ah, yes! through the casement was the gleam of Donald's torch. Oh! what news—what news?"

She ran into the little passage, threw wide the door, then staggered back, with a cry of horror. On an improvised hurdle which the two men had just placed on the ground, lay the motionless figure of Sir Evelyn.

Taking her by the arm, Helmore drew her back into the sitting-room.

"He—he has—fallen?" she gasped.

"No," gravely; "worse than that, Gwen. He has shot himself, in despair."

She uttered a piteous cry.

"He is not dead! oh! no, no!" she entreated.

"At present, he lives; Heaven knows if he will."

"Yes, yes!" she cried, casting herself at his feet. "Papa, save him—save him—for if he die, it will be I who have killed him! Oh! papa, think of that!" with a burst of hysterical weeping. "I—a murderess!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

GWENETH SAYS "YES."

Was Sir Evelyn to die?

That was the question Gweneth asked herself again and again, as she sat over the fire in the sitting-room.

If so, she had killed him. If not literally, at least she had been the cause of this sinful attempt upon his life.

He had been carried, still insensible, to his room. Then Donald had been dispatched to seek medical aid, which, however, was miles distant, and might never arrive in time.

"Thank goodness!" remarked Helmore, "I know something about wounds. I will do my best until help comes."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, papa," rejoined Gweneth, hysterically, as she clasped his hand in both hers, "save him. Do not let his death be a lifelong burden on my conscience."

"Tut, tut!" said Helmore, "you must not take all the blame. Most is attributable to his own mad folly. No; let me more truly say, his mad love. Ah, Gwen, child, you are fortunate; such affection is rare nowadays."

"I wish, in this case, I had been most unfortunate," was the sad response.

"Trust me, I shall do all I can. If the dear fellow die, I shall lose a friend that will never be replaced. Often has he been a friend to me in need."

"Can I in no way assist, papa?" questioned Gweneth.

"Not yet; except by keeping the house quiet."

So he left her, ascending noiselessly to the sick-room; while Gweneth, on tiptoe, and with held breath, went to whisper the orders for quiet to Christie.

"Eh, noo, is he sae bad?" exclaimed the old woman, adding mentally, as Gweneth retired: "To think, noo, he's done it a' for love o' Mees Gwen. Eh, but that maun be a power-fu' passion, wi' na deceit in it."

Seated over the fire alone, Gweneth's thoughts naturally ran in the same groove. The more she reflected upon the possibility of the baronet's death, the more the horror increased. Would it have been a very great self-sacrifice to have accepted him? Was not the future indifferent to her? What hope, what happiness could she expect in it? None! Why did she yet shrink and tremble at the idea? She need not fear. The opportunity for self-sacrifice had passed.

"And he will die! Yes," she moaned, "I know he will die. Oh, why does not Donald come?"

Meanwhile, he for whom she was so concerned was sitting

up in the bed, supported by the pillows, but with anything rather than the aspect of a dying man.

"Is the door secured?" he asked in a low tone, also suppressing a yawn. "You are quite certain, Helmore, we cannot be surprised?"

"Quite," responded Helmore. "The bolt is shot."

"I wonder if a fellow might indulge in a smoke?"

"I don't wonder at all; I'm sure not."

"They would think it you, *mon ami.*"

"And be horrified," with a half laugh. "One does not generally smoke, Sir Evelyn, in the room of a dying man. If the present moment is tedious to you, it's no less so to me. Let us grin and bear it, contemplating the reward to come."

"Ah!" drawing the word slowly out, "Helmore, your daughter is the loveliest of girls. I feel something of a brute to deceive her like this. But, as you say, though it is not flattering, it's the only way for me to win her."

"Play your cards well," said Helmore, "and you may really win her love, where most men lose it—after marriage."

Sir Evelyn was silent a while, lost in reflection, his arms behind his head.

"Helmore," he exclaimed, "I hope she'll never find out that I have no more attempted my life than the man in the moon!"

"Who is she likely to hear it from?" was the answer. "Your faithful gillie, Donald, himself believes it. Not one of them can tell the vital fluid of a biped from a quadruped. As to the 'doctor,' whom Donald has gone to fetch, we may rely on *him*, be sure, or I should not have employed him to do us this service, which"—laughing—"he'll perform none the less well for never having seen the inside of a hospital, nor passed a medical exam. in his life."

"It's a confounded shabby thing to do," remarked Sir Evelyn again, after a pause.

Helmore, biting his lip, sent a quick glance of scorn and half fear at the speaker; then, in an off-hand tone, said:

"Faint heart never won fair lady. *Your* heart seems faint enough. But it is not too late. Throw the whole affair over—experience a miraculous recovery—and to-morrow speed south. Why don't you?"

"Why?" ejaculated the baronet, his hand fiercely clutching the coverlet. "Because I love her, and can't. Because I have declared she shall be mine—and thus stoop to this scoundrelism to make her so!"

"Look here," put in Helmore, "you'll smash the whole thing up if you raise your voice like this. I shall have to say you're delirious. Why can you not be content?"

"It's lying here doing nothing. One begins to think."

"I'll tell you what. I'll say you've fallen asleep; and as there's no need for any one but myself to sit up, they had best go to bed and get rest, so as to be ready if wanted; then I'll brew you some whisky, bring up the cards, and we can enjoy ourselves until the 'doctor' comes."

"Do; I don't want to think."

So Helmore, descending, packed off Christie, who was nothing loath, and persuaded Gweneth also to retire.

"Donald cannot be back until near dawn," he said; "it's no good, child, wearing yourself out to no purpose. More may be required of you to-morrow—better rest now."

"But first, papa," anxiously, "how is he? Not worse?"

"I hope not, Gwen. Just now he was restless—now he is more composed. It will be better for the house to be still."

So Gweneth went to her room, and lying down in her dressing-gown to be ready were she summoned, tossed and dozed but to wake with sudden starts from terribly realistic dreams, out of pure anxiety for the man who, at the moment, was playing écarté with her father, the latter, much to his satisfaction, proving considerably the winner.

Hark! As the gray dawn begins to peep over the horizon, Gweneth starts up, listening. There is the sound of horses' hoofs. It is Donald returned with the doctor at last! She springs on to the floor and hastily arranges her dress. A door opens. It is her father going down to admit them.

"Oh, Heaven!" prays poor deceived Gweneth, "let the verdict be favorable!"

Now she hears Christie going down. She must follow; she cannot remain alone. As she quits the room, she encounters her father and the doctor. A youngish man, apparently, with a muffler about his neck and the lower part of the face, who cast a curious glance at her. Then they entered Sir Evelyn's room, and the door closed.

Gweneth descended to the parlor. She was trembling with fear and anxiety. Seated, her hands clasped, her eyes bent on the door, she waited, pale and wan in the cold dawn.

Soon Christie came to her.

"Oh, Christie!" she cried, "if he is to die, what am I?"

"Jest innocent, my bairn. The gude Lord will na hold you guilty for Sir Evelyn's sin."

"Christie, tell me if saying 'yes' now could save him, I ought to say it, ought I not?"

"Dear lassie, I think the world might ha'e many a worse fate for ye than bein' Sir Evelyn's wife. But a lassie's 'yes' or 'no' is of na count to a soul the Lord ca's awa'."

"No!" ejaculated Gweneth, with a despairing movement of the hands. "Too late! too late! Ah!"—she sprung up—"they are coming! It is papa. He knows—what?"

Almost immediately Helmore entered the room. Gweneth ran toward him, paused, noting the gravity of his expression, then exclaimed:

"Papa, speak! Tell me—tell me that he will not die!"

The words faded on her lips; her head sunk on his shoulder, and, her nerves overwrought, she burst into hysterical sobs.

"Hush, dear, hush! Will you still hold yourself answerable for his death? You must not," said Helmore, compassionately.

"Then," cried Gweneth, raising her head, her eyes dilated, "he is to die?"

"The doctor does not say that. While there is life there is hope; but," he paused, "the wound is serious."

"I understand," said Gweneth, turning away with a sob. "Heaven forgive me."

All that day the doctor remained at Glashiels, and chiefly in Sir Evelyn's room. As evening drew on, he said he was compelled to go, but left ample instructions.

In confidence to Helmore, as the latter told Gweneth, though there was a chance of recovery, he regarded the case hopeless, the patient having no desire to live.

"Sir Evelyn himself," remarked Helmore, "has no hope. He says he knows he cannot recover, and he is already making preparations for quitting the world."

Gweneth made no comment. She was past tears, past the relief of words. The stillness of the house oppressed her.

She was sitting, mournful and apathetic, by the fire, the hour being about nine o'clock, when Helmore came in. Gweneth turned her eyes in mute interrogation.

"I imagine he is sinking," he answered, standing, his elbow on the mantel, his eyes fixed on the fire. "He thinks so himself. I come to you, Gwen, a messenger from him. He wants to see you; he wishes you to grant him a favor."

"A favor?" she repeated. "Do you know its nature?"

"Yes."

"Ought I to grant it? Can I? What is it, papa?"

"That he desires to inform you himself. You can grant it; there is no reason why you should not. Whether you will, you yourself must decide. Will you come?"

She arose instantly, and followed him.

Sir Evelyn was slightly raised by pillows; his features appeared cadaverous and drawn in the light of the semi-darkened room. His countenance, however, brightened as Gweneth approached. Feebly he extended his hand.

"Oh!" she cried, piteously, as she took it, "how could you have done this thing?"

"Because I loved you," he smiled. "Death, to me, is preferable to life without you. There, don't scold me; they say I am too weak even for that."

Suddenly kneeling, bowing her head on the counterpane, Gweneth burst into tears. A genuine spasm of pain passed over Sir Evelyn's features. Genuinely, he said:

"Pray—pray, do not cry like that; I cannot bear it."

Helmore's hand was on her shoulder, his whisper in her ear:

"Control yourself, Gwen. Do you forget how weak he is? You will shorten his few moments."

That calmed her. By an effort she arose, outwardly composed.

"Sir Evelyn," she said, "if you hold me in any way to blame, for the sake of my peace of mind, I entreat your forgiveness."

"Granted instantly," he answered, still faintly. "Miss Helmore, you are in no way to blame."

"Thank you," gratefully; "my father said——"

"I had a favor to ask of you? Yes. Helmore, leave us a while." When the door had closed, taking Gweneth's hand again, he continued: "I want you, before I die, to become my wife."

"Your wife!" she repeated, startled.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "It will be a blessing I shall never claim. But—I love you, and I would have you benefit by my death."

"Sir Evelyn!" tremulously.

"Stay. Hear me. Think how few are my hours," he interrupted, plaintively. "I thought first of making a will in your favor, but my heirs might dispute it, attribute it to aberration of intellect, or coercion, leading to lawsuits. But, as my wife, you claim without will. Then I shall die happy, for I shall know I have placed you and your father far above struggling with this world. Gweneth, will you do me this favor? Will you let me call you wife before I die?"

"Oh, what can I say? What can I? You are too generous," she sobbed.

"Nay, nay, I am a selfish brute. I want to know you have been mine—mine, though but for a few hours. Reflect—look upon me, and, dearest, be generous to me."

He seemed to make an effort to rise, and dropped back with a low cry on the pillow. In terror Gweneth called her father, and stimulants were administered.

"I'll—I'll rest," murmured Sir Evelyn. "After, Gweneth—let me know—my fate. Go—dearest."

Helmore led her away. Outside he said:

"What has he asked you?"

"To wed him before he dies," she replied, sadly.

"And you?"

"I? I consent, if it be happiness to him. Why should I refuse?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"GWEN—MY WIFE."

On the afternoon of the day before the interview between Sir Evelyn and Gweneth at Glashiels, two men met unexpectedly in Piccadilly—Archie Melton and Fairfax Drayton.

The former, springing forward, clasped the latter's arm, exclaiming, excitedly:

"You loved her, and she loved you. Heaven knows but you may yet have influence where I may have none. If you ever did love her, help me now."

"Good heavens, man! of whom do you speak? Who needs my help?" ejaculated Fairfax.

"Gweneth Fane."

"Gweneth! What of her?" Then, eagerly: "Melton, do you know where she is? If you do, in mercy speak!"

Archie, stepping back, his eyes on the other's face, paused like a man suddenly brought to his senses.

"There is such a thing," he remarked, dryly, "as jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. Why are you so eager to know?"

"Why," ejaculated Fairfax, "are you so eager for my aid? Melton, if you are the good fellow I always believed you, tell me, if you can, where is Gweneth?"

Yet Archie paused, then exclaiming:

"By Jove! I'll risk it—I must," linked his arm into the other's, adding: "Come along to my club."

The smoking-room happening to be deserted, they went in, and Archie Melton, still pale and thinner from his wound, excitedly explained the pressing need.

Fairfax Drayton listened, a gathering cloud upon his handsome countenance.

"Good gracious!" he cried, when he heard of the actress having had Gweneth as her guest; "then she defied, tricked me, after all."

"Never mind that at present," broke in Archie. "What I have to say may not be delayed."

He proceeded to tell of Sir Evelyn—of Gweneth's flight from the house. At which, unable to contain his anger quietly, Fairfax sprung up and paced the room.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" he cried. "How great was my sin toward you! Will you ever be able to forgive?"

Archie went on with his recital. He could not waste time. The need was too sore. Abruptly Fairfax, halting, exclaimed:

"Why might not Marmaduke Helmore be her father?"

"Why? Because it would be too strange for even a coincidence," pursued Archie. "Man, can't you see it's a base plot to get the girl into their power? Helmore is a gambler, impecunious, living on his wits. The baronet has got him out of many a scrape. Well, for money, for which he would sell his soul, he has claimed Gweneth, so that he may assert parental authority. If it is not that, why, man alive, does he take her down to that wild, drear lodge, Glashiels, the baronet's property? Why has Sir Evelyn followed them?"

"He has?"

"He has. I have ascertained that much."

"Melton, I believe you are right," ejaculated Fairfax, warmly grasping his hand. "Heaven be praised that my poor Gwen found such a friend in you. We will save her."

"Then we'd better not lose time," said the journalist, curtly, plucking away his hand. "I only want you because—because I may need help to convince her."

Fairfax looked at him with sudden interest. Then placing his hand on his shoulder, said:

"Poor old fellow! Melton, you love her?"

"Well, is it a wonder if I do? Did not you yourself? Yes, and I could find it in my heart to curse you for the cruel deception you practiced."

"Hear me, Melton."

"Not another word. We have wasted time already."

Without waiting for response, he hurried from the room, and Fairfax followed. Before long, they were *en route* for Scotland, to rescue Gweneth. Archie Melton was so sure Helmore was not her father. Therein he was wrong.

Would they be in time? That was the question.

To stop that marriage rite? No.

Two hours after Gweneth had given her consent, she again stood by Sir Evelyn's bed, her hand in his. To all appearance he was rapidly sinking. He was pale, and his speech almost inaudible, as he leaned against the pillows supporting him in a sitting position. His hand trembled.

Within two feet of them was Marmaduke Helmore, holding a prayer-book open at the marriage service, which most solemnly and impressively he was reading. There was no agitation or remorse in his bearing nor in his tones.

Behind stood Christie and Donald, witnesses to this strange marriage. In the old Scotch woman's mind, as in Gweneth's, was the remembrance of that other wedding of a somewhat similar nature, at Inesscauld. Christie thought, nay, prayed:

"Oh, gude Lord, grant this may end mair happily for the lassie than that ain. May my bairn's sair troubles be o'er at last."

What did Gweneth think? She was too confused to understand, yet like the refrain to a sad ditty, or echo of funeral bells, there rang in her ears, in her heart, the words:

"Oh, my love—my love—my love!"

And her love was he who had deceived her, not he who was wedding her.

Then a mist seemed lifted from vision and brain. With

the sensation of one awakening from a dream, she realized her position—that she was Sir Evelyn's wife.

Donald and Christie had withdrawn. Her father had tossed the book on the table, with the air of one tossing off a mask which had begun to weary him. Then the baronet, looking with glowing eyes into Gweneth's face, whispered:

"My wife, mine; kiss me, my wife."

She obeyed. Was he not now her lord and master, for the brief moments which were his on earth? Without love, without passion, only with pity she laid her lips on his.

Glad to be released, Gweneth hurried from the room to her own, threw herself on the bed, and burst into hysterical weeping. Her nerves had been sadly overstrung, yet it was not all that. It was of Fairfax she still thought.

And Fairfax Drayton and Archie Melton, were rushing on as swiftly as means allowed, to save her.

The morning dawned. Gweneth awoke from a late, feverish sleep, to the consciousness that she was Sir Evelyn's wife. For the first moment it caused her horror; but overcoming it, dressing, she descended to the parlor to await her father and news of the patient.

Standing at the window, listlessly gazing at the wide stretch of the moor, she described on the horizon a moving speck. It seemed advancing. She had begun to take a languid curiosity in it, when a sound in the room caused her to turn.

Then she sprung back with a cry of amazement akin to fear. Close by her, as well-looking as he had been before the attempt upon his life, stood Sir Evelyn smiling into her face.

A second after his arms were round her.

"Gweneth, my darling, my charming wife!"

But with her hands she kept him off. Horror, suspicion, were stealing over her, as she cried:

"What does this mean? You are well—not dying?"

"It is your love, dearest," he laughed. "Has not love been always the best physician?"

"Love effects no cure so swift as this," ejaculated Gweneth, and now indignation blended with terror. "You are strong and well. Father," she cried, as Helmore entered, "tell me what this means!"

"Well, Gweneth, it means that all is fair in love and war," he answered. "You were so blind to your own interest, through the romantic folly of a girl, that for your sake I put the baronet up to this trick——"

"Trick!" she cried, in horror. "Then he was never wounded? He never——"

"Shot himself? No; no more than I did," was the half-laughing rejoinder.

"Listen to me, Gwen, and forgive me," began Sir Evelyn, earnestly. "It was my love; I could not give you up. I had sworn to devote my life, my wealth, to your happiness. Be merciful——"

"Merciful!" she cried. "Hypocrite! villain! I hate you! Can it be that I am this man's wife?"

"My wife, Gweneth. Nothing can alter that. And, I do not fear, you yet shall pardon."

"Never—never!" she cried, fiercely.

But he had clasped her suddenly to him, and had kissed her again and again, as she struggled to avoid him, while Helmore, lighting a cigar, ejaculated:

"Don't be an idiot, Gwen. What is done there is no undoing."

Just then a dog-cart rattled up to the lodge. Two men sprung to the ground.

At the moment, Gwen, revolted by that rain of kisses, uttered a cry. Without ceremony, the men rushed into the house, the outer door of which stood open.

A second, and they had dashed into the parlor.

"Melton! Drayton!" exclaimed Helmore. Then, angrily: "What means this intrusion? How dare you enter this house uninvited?" for the expression of both the young men showed their presence was no friendly one.

"Stand aside, fellow!" retorted Fairfax, his eyes flashing with scorn and passion. "That lady is—my wife!"

"It is false!" cried Helmore.

"It is true! and I am here to claim her." Then striding nearer, extending his arms: "Gweneth, my darling, come; I swear it is true. The woman I first wedded was dead weeks before I wedded you. In the eyes of the law, as in Heaven's, you are my wife."

Sir Evelyn had stepped back, furious at detection, and Gweneth flew to her husband's arms, crying:

"Oh, Fairfax, save me! Is it true? Oh! is it true?"

"As I believe in Heaven," he answered, fervently. "My darling, you are mine—ask Melton."

Until now—and indeed all seemed to have taken place in a few seconds—Helmore had stood speechless with amazement. Now, white with fury, advancing threateningly, he cried:

"I am not a girl, Mr. Drayton, to put credence in these assertions. As Gweneth's father, I demand proof by law——"

"As her husband," retorted Fairfax, while Gweneth clung to him, "I demand proof by law that you are her father."

"Yes, Fairfax, indeed he is," said Gweneth.

"He may have found it easy to convince you, dearest; but I repeat, I demand proof by law. Father or no father, he cannot make you less my wife. Come."

While they were speaking, Archie Melton had quietly edged his way rather before his friend. Now swiftly he placed himself between him and Helmore.

Sir Evelyn was overwhelmed with vexation, aware of the disgrace of his position, and the fact that Archie would make his villainy town talk before forty-eight hours were over.

At the word "Come," Fairfax stepped to the door. Helmore sprung forward to arrest his exit, and found himself in the grip of Archie. What followed was the work of a second. The journalist closed with Helmore, caught him in a wrestler's grip, and flung him. Then he, too, was in the passage.

The others were already in the dog-cart; Archie sprung up behind, Fairfax gave the horse its head, and they rushed across the heath like the wind.

"Confound you!" exclaimed Helmore, as he rose much shaken, for the fall had been a heavy one. "Why didn't you help me?"

"Why should I, when the game's up?" said the baronet.

"How do we know whether that fellow spoke truth?"

"Because Fairfax Drayton isn't the man to lie."

"Where are you going?" as the baronet moved to the door.

"What do you mean to do?"

"Get abroad as fast as I can—and stay there."

"So, darling, you thought Claude Ascelin my wife?" said Fairfax, as he sat by Gweneth, looking over the sea.

On quitting the lodge they had not left Scotland, but had proceeded to dear Inesscauld, where old Christie soon, with much elation of heart, had joined them.

"And Bryan your son."

"You were right there. He is my son, though, until that day you saw me with Claude, I was in ignorance of it."

"In ignorance!" ejaculated Gweneth, amazed. "And Mrs. Ascelin?"

"Is my sister-in-law. Poor Claude! I have been the unconscious instrument of whelming her previously happy life in misery. Yet she bears it like a saint. It is a sad story dearest. Very briefly I will tell it you. Claude had a twin-sister, much like her in features and person, but totally unlike her in disposition. She loved admiration, wealth, amusement, gayety. One summer a theatrical company on tour came to the small town where the captain and his daughters lived. When they left Claude's sister disappeared. She followed the company, adopting the stage as a profession. As an actress I met her. She was very handsome—I was fascinated—I did not know her past. I married her. Before a year both were disillusioned. I procured a legal separation. We never met again."

Gweneth said no word, but she fondly pressed his hand.

"When Kathrine said she was alive, I believed her, for she declared she had proof—she must have seen Claude—and I had none. But a fortnight ago I learned that my wife had died in San Francisco long before my marriage to you.

"Previously to that, I had ascertained by chance who she was, and had visited Claude, through her discovering that the little Bryan must be my own child.

"All doubt was removed by the messenger who brought me news of my wife's death; for he had been intrusted with a letter to be given on his return to England.

"In it my wife told me that she had, before starting for America, placed the boy in the care of an old woman living near Claude, trusting her sister might see and befriend it.

"She little guessed the fearful trouble it was to occasion her," concluded Fairfax, sadly. "At least, I trust not."

"Trouble!" cried Gwen. "Why, she loves him like her own."

"Ah! you do not know, dear. There is no harm in my telling you, though my heart feels to weep tears of blood when I think of that sweet woman's suffering for an oath she had solemnly given her father never to reveal she had had a sister—this sister who had driven the poor old captain in shame and disgrace from his native land."

"Poor, poor Claude!" exclaimed Gwen, when she had heard. "Oh, surely the oath should not have been so rigorously kept to her husband!"

"At the last, gladly would she have broken it," answered Fairfax; "but then it was too late. But there, dearest, dry your eyes; we must have no sadness in our joy. Remember, Gwen, we are keeping our honeymoon at last."

Taking her face between his hands fondly, he gazed upon it, then kissed away the tears that hung yet on the long, golden lashes.

The honeymoon was not spent at Inesscauld, but abroad, traveling leisurely from one lovely spot to another.

One evening Fairfax and his wife strolled into one of the fashionable open-air gardens of Baden. At the moment, the little tables had but few occupants. At one sat a handsome man alone, reading a daily paper, his countenance so grave and set that he seemed out of place in that gay gathering.

As Fairfax beheld him, with a start, he exclaimed:

"Gwen, surely that is Evan Ascelin! That look of care has changed him, but yet the likeness is striking to the photo Claude showed me when she entreated me to try to find him."

"Oh, Fairfax! can it be that we *have* found him? Ask him, dear."

"He might deny it. No; let us sit at the table and talk of Claude. We shall soon see if we are right."

They did so, talking in low tones of Ericfield and Claude. They perceived the gentleman start, and glance swiftly at them, then, apparently, resume his paper; but they were sure he was listening. Eagerly they continued, speaking of Claude's goodness, her suffering, of the unfortunate misapprehension of the husband, which had led to her misery and his own. Also, they mentioned that twin-sister, and the oath that the captain had forced Claude to take.

Oh, no, they were not mistaken; the gentleman's agitation was too visible.

Then Fairfax, touching Gwen, arose and moved away. As he had expected, before he had gone many paces a hand was placed on his arm. It was the stranger.

"Sir," he said, "would you let me speak to you an instant?"

"Certainly."

And Fairfax stepped aside with him.

"You have been speaking of a lady whom I once"—his voice faltered—"once knew well." Then, almost like a cry, "For mercy's sake, do not deceive me. Is what you have been saying true?"

"Most true. I swear it on the honor of a gentleman," replied Fairfax, solemnly.

"How—pardon me—how did you learn all this?"

"Because—Squire Ascelin—yes, I know you now, and thank Heaven I have found you, to put all this trouble right—I was the husband of Claude's twin-sister, and Bryan, the boy you so kindly befriended, is my son."

It is sunset, approaching twilight, at Westwood. Claude sits by the open window, her head resting on her hand, dreaming. Suddenly her dream appears realized.

Some one stands within a few feet of her, out there on the terrace, his arms extended. Is it a spirit? He speaks.

"Claude! Fairfax Drayton has told me all. Oh, my darling, my wife, can you forgive?"

"Evan! my husband! Oh, my love! At last! at last!"

Claude started to her feet. A second later, and she is clinging to the squire, sobbing with wild joy upon his breast.

Down in My Ladye's Garden at Ericfield, the squire is sipping his afternoon tea, dispensed by Claude's fair hand, while romping on the grass near are Stanley, Bryan—the embryo R.A.—and the rabbit. Standing by the tree, shadowing the tea-table, is Fairfax, his eyes fixed on the open glass doors of Claude's boudoir, where his wife is writing a letter to her father, who has written from Germany for "a trifle," being desperately ill. It is not a deception; he is ill, and—though he does not know it—desperately. Indeed, before the money arrives, he will be past the need of it.

Pausing in her writing, Gwen looks toward the group in the garden with a happy smile; then, hearing a step, turns to find Christie in the room.

"Weel, my bairn, there's a happy glint in your e'e; ye are thinkin' pleasant thoughts," says the old woman, fondly.

"I was thinking," smiled Gwen, "of the evening when you told me my fortune. There were to be tears, and joy, too. Ah, Christie, dear, you are truly a sybil, for the joy has come, even as did my fortune, 'from over the sea.'"

THE END

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